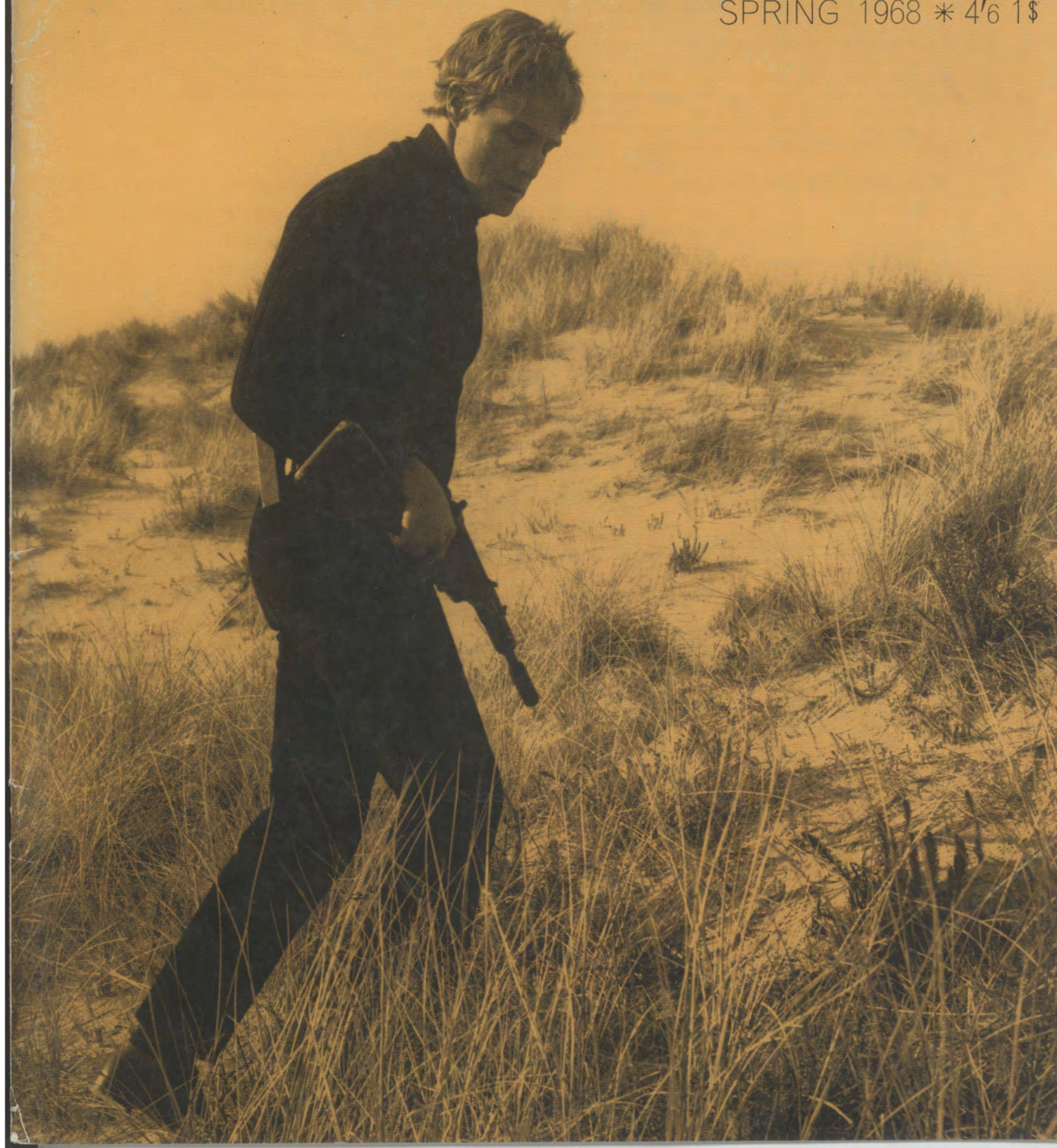


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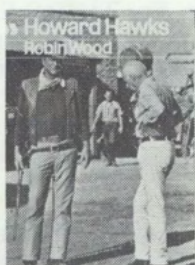
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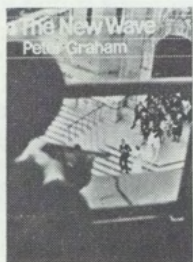
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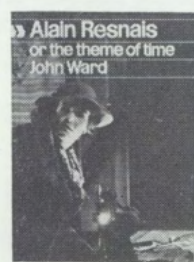
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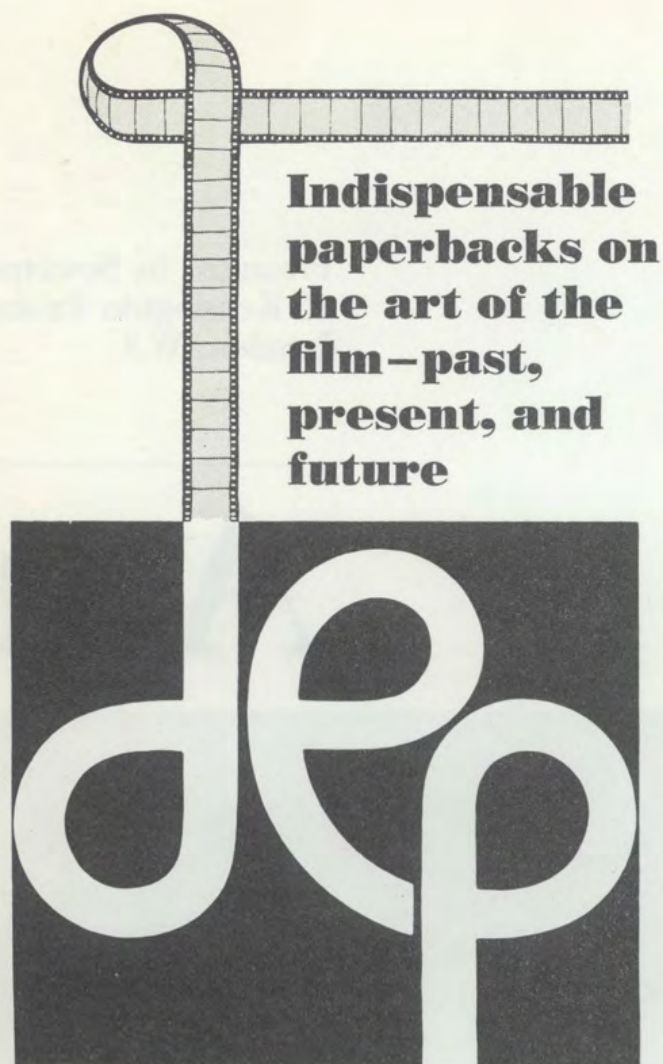
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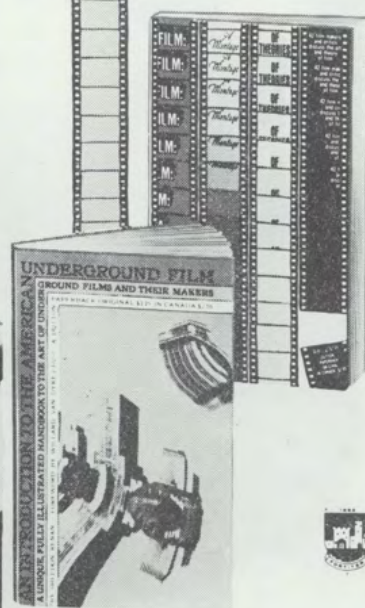
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THE INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY

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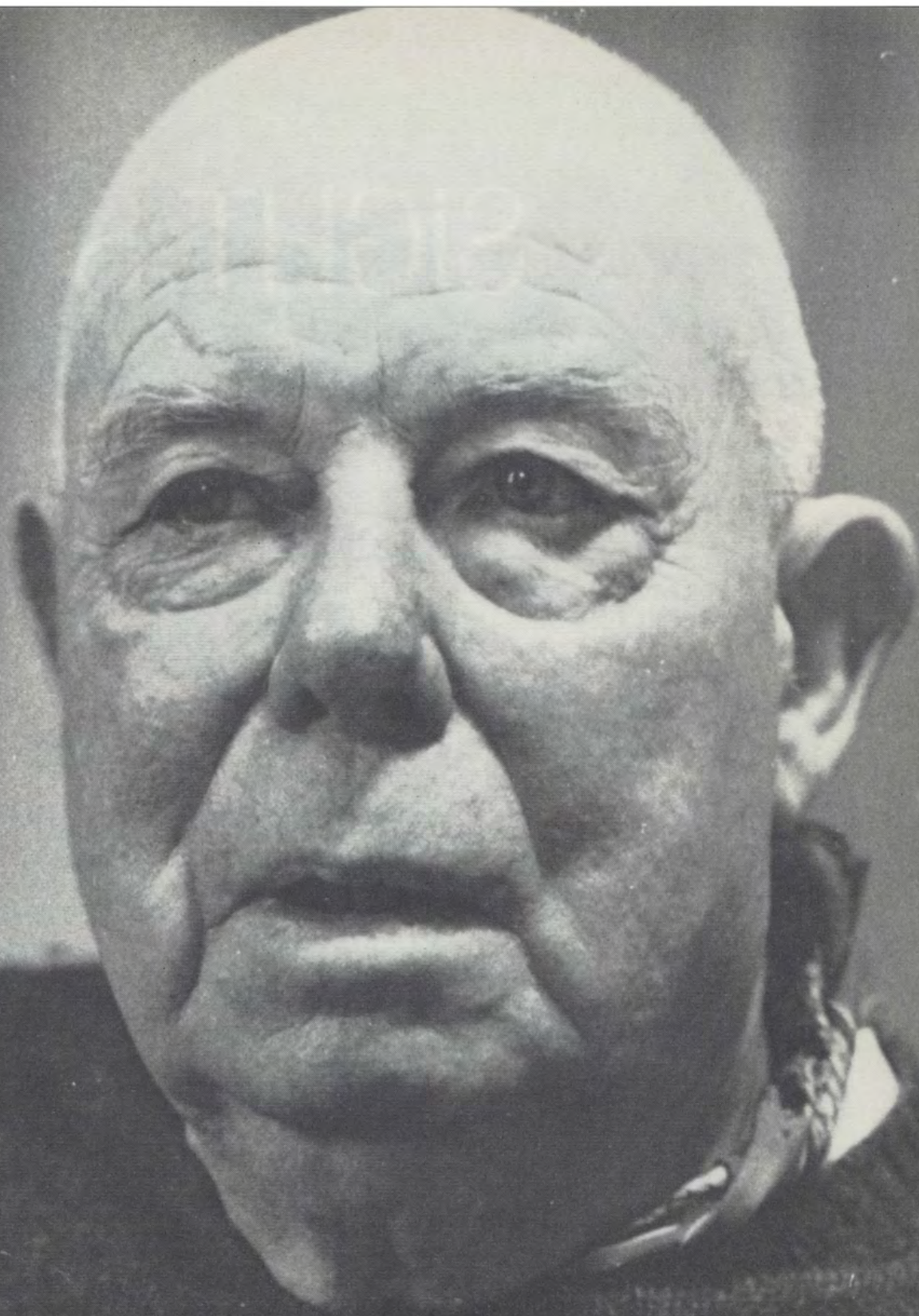
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RENOIR



Interview with Jean Renoir

Rui Nogueira and
François Truchaud

LAST AUTUMN, JEAN RENOIR was back in France. He had come to prepare a new film: meanwhile, *La Marseillaise* (1937) was reissued in its integral version, and the Cinémathèque mounted a *hommage* to his work. He talked to us in his Paris flat on the Avenue Frochot, just around the corner from the Place Pigalle and the 'Moulin de la Galette' immortalised by his father, Auguste Renoir.

A year ago, you came to Paris with your project for C'EST LA REVOLUTION, which was turned down by the Centre National du Cinéma. Was it to have been an episode film?

Yes. I had originally written seven sketches. Then I reduced the number to five, and even three, because they grew as I worked on them. I haven't abandoned the project, I've simply put it aside. Maybe one day I shall try to do something with it, I don't know. In the course of my life I've worked on a lot of projects that have never come to anything. I imagine it's the same with most people.

Then you went back to America. What have you been doing since?

I've had a lot of ideas for new films, and finally concentrated my energies on the one I'm working on now—a film about a *clocharde*, with Jeanne Moreau. It's still all a bit vague, and there isn't a final script yet. I've written one version, but I'm not satisfied with it and won't use it. I'm working on another at the moment. You know, I'm convinced that you only discover the real meaning of a film as you work on it. I don't believe in blueprints. But since the sets have to be built in advance, one has to have a plan, and that's why I'm making one for my story; but I will only discover what the story's about as I work on it, or more probably as I shoot it. One thing I am sure of, it's a good subject. Jeanne Moreau as a *clocharde* is all I need for a starting point, but I don't know exactly what I'm going to do with her. It won't be a series of episodes, but a story with a beginning and an end and it will last about one-and-a-half to two hours, that much I do know.

Will the film be set in Paris?

If not actually in Paris, then at least in the North of France. Not in the South, but somewhere where it rains.

Will this film take up the idea of liberty from BOUDU SAUVE DES EAUX? The character of the tramp—who also appeared at the end of LA CHIENNE—seems to be a recurring one in your work.

I'm not alone in suggesting this kind of solution. A large number of people today, or at least a large number of young people, are trying to reject the conventions of society and discover a way of life that is less comfortable but more free.

Are you referring to the hipster movement in the United States?

Not specially. I think this is something that had to happen. As inevitable as rain after sunshine. Something natural and normal.

When you were shooting THE RIVER in India, didn't you also think of making a film about the pariahs?

Yes. But the main reason one can't make a film about the pariahs, or about any other minority for that matter, is

language. I don't think a film about the pariahs made in English or French would be any good. One would follow the life of a pariah family on a boat going down the Ganges, follow all the little things that happen to them, but if they're not speaking their own language, they're not expressing themselves properly. If you use famous actors, French or American stars, the film will be completely false. It isn't possible. The only way to make this kind of film would be to have a great deal of money put up by people who realised they'd never see it again. Because either the film would be uncommercial, being in a language the general public couldn't understand, or, if it was in a commercially exploitable language, it would be false and I wouldn't want to make it.

Had you envisaged it as a documentary?

No, I'd envisaged . . . well, yes, if you like. It depends what you mean by documentary.

Would you have used amateur actors?

Yes, or else Indian actors sufficiently familiar with the pariah life and language to give the characters some semblance of authenticity.

As Rossellini did in INDIA 58?

Yes, but it would probably have been more of a dramatic film than *India*, which is closer to pure documentary.

Would you say that THE RIVER is a fulfilment?

Oh! I think it's more of a beginning than an end. Shooting that kind of story makes you think about many things, you re-examine your values, and you modify them.

But THE RIVER does mark the close of one period of your work, which then opens in a new direction . . .

Let's put it more simply and say that *The River* brought me into contact with new things, taught me something about things I didn't know, and that this had a great influence on me.

On a point of detail: LA TOSCA, the film which you prepared and Carl Koch finally directed, bears a strong resemblance to your own work.

Well, you know, Koch had worked a great deal with me. I've never seen *La Tosca*, but everyone tells me what you have just said. It's because we worked together like brothers: inevitably I had a lot of his ideas and he had a lot of mine. He was a marvellous collaborator—on *La Grande Illusion* and on *La Règle du Jeu*.

Like Jacques Becker . . .

Yes, certainly. Becker and Koch were my friends, my colleagues in film-making. For *La Tosca* I shot only the first sequence, and it has apparently been used in Koch's film. And of course we had written a script which for once was fairly precise: since it was adapted from a story that already existed, we couldn't wander away from it, we had to follow the story. Koch, who is dead now, was a really remarkable man, and it's a great pity he made so few films. He could have done some wonderful things. His knowledge of life was very profound, and he also had a sense of the absurdity of the human condition . . . that's very rare nowadays, people seem to take everything seriously. One has to take things seriously, of course—everything is serious, but still it has its amusing side even in its seriousness.

There have been a number of remakes of your films: Fritz Lang (SCARLET STREET, HUMAN DESIRE), Luis Buñuel (JOURNAL D'UNE FEMME DE CHAMBRE) and now Jean-Pierre Melville (LA CHIENNE). How do you feel about remakes?

I think that if the story is good, remakes are perfectly justified. The good stories in history have been used ten or even twenty times over by different authors. Shakespeare never wrote an original plot, but borrowed his stories from the Italian chronicles, from ancient history or from existing plays. And he's the world's greatest dramatist, so if he could do it, so can we. An erroneous belief has taken hold since the Romantic period that the originality of a literary or dramatic work depends on the originality of its plot. In my opinion this is absolutely untrue. The plot is necessary and you need a good one, but you can borrow it from anywhere you like. I even think that to encourage good stories and good films, there ought to be medals, prizes of some kind, for people who plagiarise. We want to encourage plagiarism.

Of the kind Godard practises in his films?



"LE DEJEUNER SUR L'HERBE". SHOOTING IN THE GARDEN OF AUGUSTE RENOIR'S HOUSE, LES COLLETES.

Yes, of course, and he's perfectly aware of what he's doing. It's the same with all the classics. Let's take a great classical dramatist like Corneille, who borrowed *Le Cid* from De Castro—all the great classical dramas are derived from an existing source. It's not a question of copying but simply of using the same springboard.

LA MARSEILLAISE has just been reissued in its original, integral form. Was it hard to reconstruct?

Not so difficult as *La Règle du Jeu*. We had more help. The Cinémathèque was very cooperative, and we were able to use the soundtrack of a Russian print. It took a lot of work, but it always looked feasible.

Twenty years before Rossellini's *LA PRISE DE POUVOIR PAR LOUIS XIV*, *LA MARSEILLAISE* uses the same technique of mingling the general and the particular, historical fact and personal anecdote.

I still haven't seen Rossellini's film, though I'm hoping to. For me Rossellini is one of the great directors, all his films are important. He's a man who has the cinema at his fingertips; he breathes cinema and thinks cinema, so everything he does is interesting. Rossellini is one of those people who express themselves directly through what they create. His films are self-portraits.

You once said that *LA MARSEILLAISE* was one of your favourite films.

I don't think I can have said that because I have no favourite film. Of course some of them may have certain sentimental associations . . . but you know, the real source of happiness, not just in the cinema but in any kind of human endeavour, is the fact of creating. Once a thing is done, well, it's done. Of course it's very nice to be applauded by audiences and very unpleasant to be booed: I'll admit that's important, but not that important. The real thing, the real intoxication if I may call it that, is in the act of creation: that's what matters,

whether one is creating an apple pie, a film, a child or a painting.

What are your most pleasant memories?

There have been good moments on all my films, but my most treasured memories have to do with actors. I love working with actors.

In America, you and Robert Ryan became friends while shooting *WOMAN ON THE BEACH*. You even wrote the preface to the book by his wife, Peggy Ryan.

Bob Ryan is a marvellous person. Professionally he's absolutely honest in everything he does. But he was unlucky in happening on a period in which the American cinema was in full cry after war epics—all of them highly successful. I can understand people making them, given that a business has to make money or grind to a halt. If the cinema didn't make money, tomorrow there would be no cinema, so one mustn't blame the people who make commercial films. But commercial films consume a lot of talent. People can lose a lot of their feathers in them. But they also produce people like Leo McCarey, who has never pushed himself forward and who is often forgotten. He made the admirable *Ruggles of Red Gap* in 1935, with Charles Laughton, and the ease and elegance of his work is really remarkable. He is very ill—he was in hospital when I left America a fortnight ago.

You have talked on several occasions about the hipster movement. What do you see in it?

I believe it's an international movement. It's simply a turning of the wheel, a querying of the values of the society these boys and girls grew up in. I think that suddenly they're questioning the motive force behind most people who work or do not work in contemporary society—namely, success. Suddenly they're wondering whether success really means as much as people have supposed. Success, and therefore money. In other words it's a reaction against a purely commercial society, and I think that, with only slight differences, the feeling is the same everywhere. I think the movement of the Red Guards in China is a little the same, maybe . . .

What do you think of Jean Renoir the writer?

I don't, since that is me and one doesn't judge oneself. I wrote *Les Cahiers du Capitaine Georges* because I didn't think it was possible to make a film out of it, even though I had been asked to. It's a confession, the confession of a man who lived a great love through a period of history; but above all it's the confession of a man explaining his reactions in the face of a period of considerable change, for the world before 1914 and the world after are entirely different worlds. So it's a witness to this transition talking about himself. It's so personal, so intimate that I find it very difficult to imagine it translated into images. These are thoughts, not pictures.

What do you think of the influences or affinities that exist between directors? For example, THE SOUTHERNER conjures up the King Vidor of HALLELUJAH and OUR DAILY BREAD, the John Ford of TOBACCO ROAD and THE GRAPES OF WRATH.

That's very possible, and I'm glad, because one ought to be open to influences. I'm not at all in favour of isolation. Quite the contrary. I'm in favour of contact with the world; and if you have contact then you can't but be influenced. And besides, they're both directors whom I admire as men. King Vidor is a wonderful person. In the whole of human history there have never been sincere artists who weren't influenced. So of course total isolation is a fight against outside influences, it's like saying "I personally am so interesting, I have such a beautiful soul that I want to serve it up to you on a plate." I prefer the idea of digesting the world, observing it and trying to transform one's observation into something personal, but with observation as a starting point. And under observation I'd include reading books, seeing films or plays, listening to music; these are some of the elements that influence you. Or just contact with the man in the street. I've never tried to influence anyone at all. In effect, when I make a film I'm asking other people to influence me.

As a director you have made remarkable use of colour. Yet you have used it in only five films.

I have not made more films in colour because it hasn't seemed appropriate. I think that some subjects demand black

and white, others need colour. In point of fact, as we progress further, so more and more subjects benefit from being treated in colour, for the simple reason that the public has grown used to colour, even expects it. Nowadays the black and white film is almost an exception. But in my opinion the danger of colour is realism. I think that in every art one has to retain the possibility of a transposition. One mustn't just copy, one mustn't imitate nature—luckily, colour processes aren't perfect and this copy of nature remains rather remote, so that in practice colour offers other means than black and white of effecting this transposition. I believe the ideal of people working on colour—laboratory workers, chemists and technicians—to succeed completely in copying nature is manifestly false. The day they can reproduce nature exactly, there will be no more cinema. What's interesting is the transposition by a cameraman, by a director or an actor . . . the concentration, the translation.

Why is it that in the cinema older directors can make stronger, more mature works (Ford, Hawks, Walsh, Lang, etc.)?

It's the same in all the arts, in any craft. If a writer tends to repeat himself in his later works, it's because he is not a very good writer. But think of Stendhal, for instance. One of his last works was *Lamiel*, a quite extraordinary book, absolutely different from anything he'd done before. Now there are people who are famous for a single novel, a single film, a single picture . . . no, not a picture, painting won't allow that, painting forces the artist into a constant progression because it's a craft in which the technical—or more correctly the material—element plays an enormous part. The danger with the cinema, now that it has become so technically perfect, is that you can detach yourself, forget the problems of translating something through an image or a sound. It's all too easy. The modern director is surrounded by splendid technicians, men of skill and taste who do everything for him. The result is that the director is a bit like the station-master who makes the train run on time but hasn't actually anything to do with the train. This is dangerous and one must guard against it. But this doesn't mean that the director should create the film on his own, not at all; everyone brings his own little bit, and one of the director's most interesting tasks is to coax everyone into expressing himself more fully.

So the cinema is a constant process of self-examination?

Yes, of course. With writers it may be more erratic, but it seems to me that with the greatest writers there is a kind of constant progression till the day they die. With painters it shows more clearly. It's obvious that Picasso today is stronger and more profound than he was at the age of twenty; it's obvious that Titian as an old man achieved an indisputable mastery. It's true that Velasquez and Goya . . .

Would you agree that areas of your work still remain to be explored?

It sometimes seems to me that people go round the edges of my films. When the Cinémathèque invited me to come along and present one of my films, I chose *Le Caporal Epingle*. Not that I consider it a great masterpiece, far from it. It's a workmanlike film that I made as best I could; but through it I tried to express certain things which obviously . . . well, which people just haven't grasped.

Could you have done anything more on PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE?

Absolutely nothing. That's the conclusion I came to. When the film was finished, Braunberger, my friend and producer, said to me: "It has the makings of a feature film. Do you want to try to turn it into a feature?" I said that I didn't think so but I was willing to try. So I tried to write something to stretch it out, but it wouldn't come. Then I said, "If you don't mind, I'll ask Jacques Prévert to help me out." So Jacques and I thought about it and tried to work out something by adding a long prologue and an epilogue to the story. But nothing we tried hung together, it didn't work at all. The whole idea of making it longer was a commercial one; for myself, I had conceived it as a short film, the way it is.

Do you think television is really an art form?

Why not? Take the commercials on American TV, for example, they're really extraordinary. The advertisements for



"FRENCH CANCAN": JEAN RENOIR, FRANCOISE ARNOUL.

General Electric, Ford or Coca-Cola—like some of the French commercials—contain images of astonishing beauty and boldness. It seems to me that these commercials are undeniably an art form, and I love them.

Do you think you might work again for television?

If the opportunity arises, yes, especially if I have a really original idea. If I haven't, there would be no point in doing what my colleagues do so well and so much better than I should. But if I get an idea that seems to me a little out of the ordinary, then I should like to . . .

Do you find there's a real affinity between your own films and those of the younger French directors today?

I must admit that I feel very close to much of what the younger generation is doing. Their way of thinking is probably very close to mine, and I can understand the sort of affinity that exists between the New Wave directors and myself. Things have to be kept moving. I did certain things, they've done others, and new people will come along to do something else again. The world, life, can never stand still, because immobility means death . . . but of course even death is alive because there is decomposition, which is a very interesting thing. Movement and metamorphosis are essential to our world. The leaves on this tree are starting to turn yellow, then they will fall, and turn into a nice little pile of compost so that tiny blades of new grass will come up again next spring.

That's the whole philosophy of THE RIVER, and one aspect of the theme of liberty which runs through all your films.

Yes, liberty. And in this context one situation that preoccupies me a great deal is the question of adaptation, the way in which an individual or group of individuals may be accepted by a different environment. *La Règle du Jeu*, for instance, is about the introduction of an aviator—who doesn't belong at all—into a social group which functions very well without him. So long as he's not there, everything works fine. He arrives, and despite his purity, his honesty and his goodness, he destroys everything and is himself destroyed. Films that take place in a prison are very convenient because the characters are automatically cut off, which is a great help in telling a story. With *La Grande Illusion*, for instance, the fact that it's all enclosed within four walls is marvellous: it's a foolproof situation. But it can also be a good thing to get a little lost, because that's often when you produce your best work. For I'm convinced that whatever you do that's good—or bad, for that matter—you do in spite of yourself . . . you don't know in advance that it's going to be good.

This chance element in creation seems to tie in with the idea of freedom, which you approach in a variety of ways in the sketches that were to make up C'EST LA REVOLUTION.

Yes, I had written those sketches very carefully. It wasn't a film about revolution. I had some comic situations which I shall certainly use somewhere else. For instance, one about a husband whose wife is unfaithful. Everyone in the village is

trying to put a stop to what they regard as an unhappy situation, but the husband is furious because he wants his wife to deceive him. She brings home a charming young man who shows him every possible consideration, gives him little presents, looks after him, pulls up a chair for him when he wants to sit down—and people want to deprive him of all this! I had also written another sketch about two corporals from opposing armies who are trapped in a completely devastated region. They don't like being there at all because they're in a farm which has become a kind of symbol for the two armies, who keep firing shells at it. So there they are, they want to get out, but if they try to leave their hole they'll be killed. And they come to the conclusion that in time of war being a prisoner is best. It's a nice, healthy life, but the one snag is that you're a prisoner in enemy territory. You're far from home, fed a kind of food you don't like, surrounded by people who speak a foreign language—in other words, you're a foreigner. And of course they don't like the idea. So they decide to change uniforms and get taken prisoner by their own armies. Not a bad idea, is it?

Meanwhile in London...

MEANWHILE, IN LONDON for the opening of *La Marseillaise*, Renoir demonstrated the gentle art of winning friends and influencing people by his patient, courteous and apparently inexhaustible interest in everybody and everything. Even the talk he delivered in his own inimitable way one Sunday morning at the Academy Cinema became 'not so much of a lecture as a conversation'—and the audience purred. Some of his themes and anecdotes—for instance, the story of how he and his associates did everything on *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes* from generating the electricity to developing the negative—are familiar from earlier interviews or articles; others, included in the following extracts, may be less familiar, or are at any rate so irresistibly phrased that they demand perpetuation.

The Glamour of the Movies

When I started to make films my ambition was just to be successful, I was attracted by the glamour of the profession. Slowly, I discovered that to make films was something much more important, and perhaps a way to discover reality.

It was during the 1914 war: I was a pilot in a squadron, and a good friend of mine was the son of Professor Richer. Professor Richer had discovered something very precise about the inner reactions of the body to certain gases and liquids, and was also working on artificial nourishment; he was a very important man, and I admired him very much for one reason—I didn't understand what he was looking for! One day my friend Richer came back off leave from Paris and told me "My father took me to a movie." Well, you know, I was an officer in the cavalry, now in the air force, and I despised movies; to me movies were characters jerking on a piece of white canvas and shown mostly in carnivals, not even in a real theatre. But Richer said, "My father, who is a great man, told me that there is an actor who may convince you that movie-making is something very important." During my next leave I went to see this actor, who was called Charlie Chaplin; and back at the squadron I told Richer, "I believe your father is right when he says that we are confronted with a kind of revolution: this way of projecting life on a white screen is probably the new artistic expression of our century, the *real* artistic expression of our century."

Then I was shot in the leg by a Bavarian infantryman, and

while I was convalescing on crutches, there was nothing else to do and I started looking at movies. In the beginning, I must confess, I didn't like them at all, but I became more and more convinced. I was so much impressed that I even took a projector to my father's house—by then he was paralysed in the legs—and showed him a Chaplin film. He was delighted. Slowly the idea grew in me that I had to be part of this revolution. I had the idea that I was going to be a leader, that I was going to be important. I lost these childish ideas only when I was confronted with the difficulty of the profession, only when I understood that you may have a great idea, but you still have to deal with the industry, with money; and you have to deal with the public. The public likes what already exists, but I dreamed of showing things which didn't exist before me. I was absolutely convinced that if I showed something a little different the public would love me. Which was not true. They just hated me.

Discovering Reality

To make films may be one good way to discover bits of reality. I believe that one of the most important functions of the film-maker is the destruction of cliché. We are surrounded by cliché. We believe that life is what we are told. Not at all. Life is something very different. Life is a combination of what does exist and what you have in mind: this combination may bring a work of art, may bring one second of happiness, one thing being as important as the other.

On Perfection

When I started to make films we really had to know what a camera is, we had constantly to think of what was going on. The technical dangers are bigger today because technique is perfect, and perfection is terribly dangerous in this world. I even believe that if a woman were absolutely perfect, her nose that of the best Greek statue, the proportions of her body divine, and her character delightful, then this woman would never find real love in her life. To find real love you must be *imperfect*. We hate perfection. We believe that we like it but we don't. We love life, that's more important than perfection. And the terrible thing about film-making is that the people who are important, the masters of the profession, the producers and even the big stars, believe in perfection. Very often people say, "What's wrong with Hollywood is that they think only of money." Money is not so dangerous, not nearly so dangerous as the cult of perfection. Anyway, it's wrong to believe that Hollywood loves money: they love to *spend* money . . .

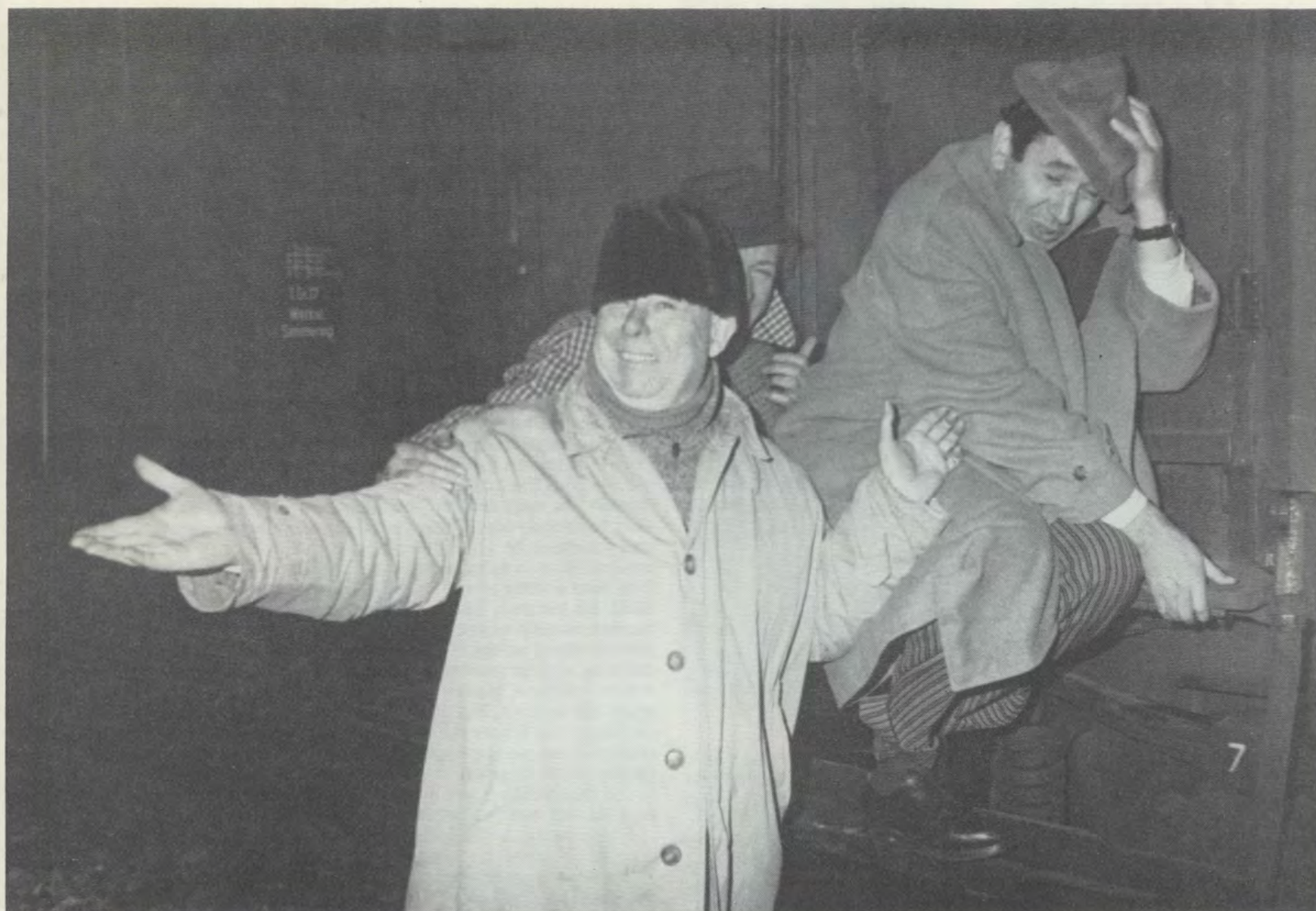
But with the perfection of technique today, all the solutions are brought to you, anything you want. You want the brightest colours?—the best cameraman will bring you the brightest colours. You don't have to worry about anything. And since the pictures are expensive, you have to use very well-known actors. And the very well-known actors arrive with their solutions all ready—they will deliver the goods as well as they did in their last picture. This means that you are going to see exactly the same actor for the rest of your life. He won't change. Why should he? Not to change brings him a million dollars every year.

The danger is that of finding yourself confronted with answers which are not your own, answers you didn't have to work to find. In the early days, directors had to make their imagination work in order to balance what they were missing with inferior technique. Now that technique is perfect, you must become a great technician and then forget about technique. But first you must be a great technician.

I regret the magnificent innocence of the first films. If I could go back to the time of Hoot Gibson, Mary Pickford, directors like Fred Niblo and Tourneur, I would be delighted. But we can't. We must accept time as it comes.

Public Taste

One day I was talking to one of the most experienced entertainers of our time—Maurice Chevalier, who really knows what success is. I asked him how he chose the songs



"LE CAPORAL EPINGLE": RENOIR, JACQUES JOUANNEAU.

for his shows at the Casino de Paris, when he appeared alone on stage for an hour and sang perhaps ten or twelve different songs. "It's very simple," he said, "if I sing something new, something they've never heard before, they never like it. Never." So he used to start with songs from last year or perhaps two years before; and those songs, which had been unsuccessful then, were now successful because the public knew them. In other words, if you want to persuade the public to accept a new point of view, to share in a discovery, you have to play the part of a prostitute, to put on a bit of make-up in order to attract . . . she may be wonderful inside, but if she doesn't put on a bit of make-up no one will follow her . . . You have to be a little bit dishonest, you have to give something the public can follow, and the easiest thing is the action. You must take a popular plot. For instance, I am sure that initially *La Grande Illusion* was so successful because it was an escape story. The escape story has nothing to do with my film. But it's a mask, a disguise, and this disguise made *Grande Illusion* a big money-maker.

The Purpose of Art

Of course the purpose of any real art is, among other things, to reveal the artist, to make the artist alive, and to give the public—something more important than anything else in life—the possibility of a contact, a conversation. I don't believe you admire a Cézanne painting of apples because it is a good imitation of apples: you like it because you have a conversation with Cézanne . . . Forgive me for a personal recollection. Gabrielle, who was my father's model for part of his life, was with me in Hollywood and one day she said, "Jean, it's too bad that you don't own a portrait of your father

by himself . . . But after all, it's not important, because you have a little painting of roses and that's exactly his portrait." You see what she wanted to mean?—that through the roses and without showing himself, Renoir was showing himself more than through a self-portrait.

A Certain Grace

La Règle du Jeu was the result of a dream, of something I had inside myself, deep down. I believe that many authors, and certainly myself, tell one story all our lives, the same one, with different characters, different surroundings. My preoccupation is with the meeting: how to belong, how to meet. In *La Règle du Jeu* this preoccupation is quite obvious, not only because someone of different character is introduced into a certain milieu, but because this character (the flier, played by Roland Toutain) is pure, whereas the group is impure. The others were good people, I loved them. People thought that in writing *La Règle du Jeu* I was criticising society, but not at all. I wish I could live in such a society—that would be wonderful. But in any case this society was not pure and the flier was pure. That was the problem I had inside myself, without realising it at the time.

What pushed me to make *La Règle du Jeu* was an ambition to treat a subject which would allow me to use the exterior forms of a French comedy of the eighteenth century. I was also a little bit influenced by Musset, but my ambition was to find again a certain elegance, a certain grace, a certain rhythm which is typical of the eighteenth century, French or English. And that's the way I made the picture. During it, as always, I discovered that my problem was my old problem: what would happen to the stranger who wants to belong to a milieu which



RENOIR AS ACTOR: WITH CATHERINE HESSLING IN CAVALCANTI'S "LA P'TITE LILI".

is not his. And of course the problem of how the poacher is going to be admitted to the servant milieu. I discovered this only afterwards, but I thought that's not bad, the picture will certainly please. I was sure the public would like it—it was a light picture, parties are not big problems, and the big problems were so well hidden that the audience wouldn't be hurt in their feelings. Well, I was very wrong. Starting with the first show it was a kind of riot in the theatre. I even saw one gentleman who was trying to light a newspaper to set fire to the theatre and prevent them from showing such a piece of trash. And I came to the conclusion that the film was at least a very controversial one. That hurt me very deeply—I was so surprised. I didn't shoot *La Règle du Jeu* with the idea of being a revolutionary. It was a big surprise and a bad one.

The picture is shown now in its complete version. There is only one scene missing, in which I (as Octave) am walking with Toutain during the hunting party. I'm trying to make him forget about his unhappy love, and I explain that the only women who should interest a man like him, a gentleman, are servants. Choose your mistresses among servants, I say.

The River

One day in Hollywood I read a review of a book by Rumer Godden which ran something like this: "This is one of the best written English books of the last fifty years: it probably won't earn one penny." I thought well, that's a wonderful review, I must read it. I bought the book, I read it, and I understood right away that it had great possibilities for a film. I got in touch with Rumer Godden and asked her publisher to give me an option. Meanwhile, a man I didn't then know was trying to make pictures in India because he had money there. One day this man was travelling in an aeroplane, sitting next to a very charming Indian lady who asked him what he was doing in India. When he told her he was going to make Indian films, she said, "You won't. You may get a picture on a piece of celluloid, but you have to know India to talk about India." This statement was so logical that he was impressed, and asked what he ought to do. She suggested that he should tell an Indian story seen through the eyes of Westerners, so that you would approach India through an intermediary, and mentioned Rumer Godden's *The River*. He'd never heard of the book; he'd never heard of Rumer

Godden; but he was impressed by the lady and asked her who she was. She was Nehru's sister. He went to the publisher to try to get the rights to the book, and was told that an option had been sold to a certain Jean Renoir. "Who is Jean Renoir?" he asked. Eventually he asked me if he could buy the option. I told him I wanted to make the film, and he said, "Well, if you're so stubborn, let's shoot it together." So we started. I must add that before meeting him I had visited every studio in Hollywood, even in Paris, trying to find a producer, and everyone answered very wisely: "A picture in India without Bengal Lancers, elephants or a tiger will never make one penny." I tried very hard to see if I could have tigers... but it didn't work. Finally I found this man who produced the picture, United Artists took it, and it was very successful.

Actors and Acting

Quite late I discovered a marvellous method which I owe to Louis Jouvet and Michel Simon, who used to apply it on the stage. It was well known up to the romantic period, and it's called the Italian method—*à l'italienne*. You sit down around a table with the actors, and you read the dialogue exactly as though you were reading the telephone directory: no expression, absolutely blank. You forbid them to give any expression, and you must be very severe, because any actor instinctively wants to give an expression before knowing what it's all about. You read a scene about a mother witnessing the death of her child, for instance. The first reaction of the actress playing the mother would probably be tears. We're surrounded by clichés, and for many actors it's as though they had a little chest-of-drawers, with an answer to a question in each drawer. Drawer number three—"Mother witnessing death of child": and you apply the answer. But if you read the lines without any expression, this forces the actor to absorb them; and all of a sudden—you see them spark. One of the actors has a kind of feeling which is going to lead him towards an interpretation of the part which is not a cliché. It will be his own interpretation, having nothing to do with what was done before.

For instance, with Michel Simon this is the way we discovered Boudu: by reading, reading, reading. One day, without realising it, almost in spite of himself, Michel started reading with the voice of Boudu. I told him, "Here we are, we've got the part." And out in the courtyard, he was walking like Boudu. A Boudu I didn't expect. I didn't know this Boudu five minutes before. This Boudu was new, a creation by Michel Simon, and perhaps a little bit by myself, not the Boudu which had been done a hundred times on the stage.

Dubbing

I hate dubbing. I even believe that in a period of high civilisation, like the twelfth century, if people had done dubbing in films they would have been burned in the public square for pretending that man may have one body and two souls.

"ELENA ET LES HOMMES": RENOIR, MEL FERRER, INGRID BERGMAN, JEAN MARAIS.



THE PLEASURES OF THE National Film Theatre's great Buster Keaton season have mostly been friendly and familiar. It was hardly on the cards that the season would reveal a Keaton film more totally accomplished than *The General* or more winning than *Our Hospitality*. It didn't. But a series of concentrated viewings—seeing the films dead silent in a small viewing theatre, six or seven shorts at a time—confirmed two certainties. One is that one can absolutely never be bored by Buster, in any quantity, at any time, and even when, as once happened, the picture is printed up backwards, with Czech titles in looking-glass writing. And secondly, though some of the shorts may merge into each other, the features are exceedingly self-contained. There was one Langdon; one Lloyd; one Laurel and Hardy; there have certainly been many Chaplins, but decades separate the ambassadorial grandee from the tramp. But in the years between *The Boat* (1921) and *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1927), there were a lot of Keatons.

He had two spectacular advantages: his timeless American face, which means that in a costume picture (even in the absurd hearthrug and fur boots of *The Three Ages*) he never seems any more ridiculous than he intends to; and his chameleon classlessness. His indolent millionaires (in *Battling Butler* and *The Navigator*) or his pushing young men from Main Street (*Three Ages*, *Seven Chances*) never look as though they were making off in some richer boy's clothes. Chaplin's comic personality started from English class-consciousness; Keaton's was American and free. In disguise—at the beginning of *Steamboat Bill Jr.*, when he turns up in moustache and beret—he could look curiously seedy, like a weasel made up as a hairdresser's assistant. It is a great moment, made much of, when the moustache comes off and the Keaton face emerges: the great blank page, on which he could write every process of thought.

* * *

Imagine someone who has never seen a Keaton film, doesn't even know what he looks like. Would he leave *The Butcher Boy* (1917) curious about the identity of the pale young man who gets stuck in the molasses and later attacked by a ferocious schoolmistress brandishing a pistol? One suspects so, partly because Keaton's apprehensive good looks always make him stand out (comedy, on the whole, is not a profession of the handsome), and partly because even in his first screen appearance he draws attention to himself simply by not doing so. Everyone else is capering and jittering: Buster is just terribly puzzled that his hat should have become attached so irrevocably to his head.

The Arbuckle shorts blur into a confusion of glue, paint, whitewash, feathers, falling scenery, with Buster hovering like a small, anxious referee over Fatty's more obese and girlish cavortings. In a slightly repellent way, Arbuckle could be rather funny, tossing his curls as a terrifying St. Trinian's vision in *The Butcher Boy*, or twirling a tiny parasol—he seems to have found grotesque female disguise irresistible—in *Coney Island*. (This, incidentally, is the film in which Buster actually laughed: an error not to be repeated.) Buster appears as a dashing Westerner, with six-gun and cigar, or a harassed surgeon, waving a chopper and heavily blood-stained. In *Backstage*, playing a bewigged Roman lady while Fatty lolls in a tiger-skin, he suddenly looks unnervingly like Bette Davis. Elsewhere, he's to be seen making a wild and unmistakable Keaton entry on a bicycle, or abstractedly lubricating his horse's legs with an oil-can. There's one extraordinary moment: Arbuckle in *The Cook* (1918) doing the little dance with the rolls which Chaplin was to perfect seven years later in *The Gold Rush*.

Arbuckle was the right ally for Keaton (Buster himself always insisted on this) because his gags are planned as film jokes, and paradoxically because their styles were so different that the essentially solitary Keaton never risked becoming straight man to his stout partner. Watching these two-reelers, however, one realises just how hard they found it to keep them going, to think in terms of a single situation which could be spun out for twenty minutes. First reels tend to be better than second reels; invention runs out or (as in the case of *The Butcher Boy*) everything starts all over again.



the great blank page

Penelope Houston



"THE THREE AGES".

Keaton *sans* Arbuckle was to perfect shorts which are intellectually satisfying as well as funny, because everything follows with blinding comic logic from one initial premise. This was still not the rule: the very curious *The Playhouse*, for instance, has two linked ideas, of an almost metaphysical oddity. In the first half, we're introduced to a whole theatre peopled by Keatons—Buster playing all the parts, all the instruments in the orchestra pit, providing his own critical audience for himself. The point of the virtuoso joke depends on everyone's ability to recognise the second most recognisable comedian in the world. Then the film changes tack: the joke is Buster's inability, back in his natural character as stagehand, to recognise which of two identical twins is the one he loves, or even to acknowledge that there *could* be two girls looking alike. Crossly, he keeps finding he's caught up with the wrong girl. It isn't all that funny, but as a notion for a comedy it has all the abstract absurdity of Keaton at his most mathematical.

Over many of these 1921-22 shorts hangs a certain melancholy. They are ceaselessly funny, and so effortlessly inventive that Keaton throws away jokes anyone else would loiter over. One thinks of him casually striking a match on the cigar store Indian who promptly rounds on him with a tomahawk; or rolling himself up in a carpet and then rolling briskly downstairs in it; or as the blacksmith who feels that horses should be shod according to the procedures followed in shoe-shops. But the slapstick havoc is seldom entirely comic; and two great chase films, *The Goat* and *Cops*, both hinge on the feeling of fatalism with which Buster meets doom at every corner.

* * *

The Goat is the chase film which has everything. One feels that modern directors (Clive Donner, Blake Edwards, Dick Lester, etc.) who like to end comedies with chases ought to be made to watch it ten times through: not as a penance, however deserved, but as an object lesson in relevance and coherence and the importance of conveying, even in the silliest context, some sense of real danger. There is only one bad joke in the film: the uncharacteristic, because impossible, shot at the end when the lift goes rocketing through the roof. Good jokes include Buster queueing behind a couple of shop window dummies and restlessly surveying their immobility; Buster decorating the 'Wanted Man' poster with a fur tippet, and then forgetting that he's trying to disguise his face and getting fascinated by the angles of the fur moustache; Buster unveiled as the lone rider on the model horse, whose plaster legs very slowly buckle under him; and the moment when he realises that he is sitting gaily down to dinner with the sheriff who has been hunting him, and escapes by hurtling off his chair, using some part of the sheriff as springboard, and diving straight through a fanlight.

Buster ends *The Goat* in triumph: the girl on his arm and

the enemy routed. *Cops* is more extraordinary, because chance plays an even more malign role and the enemy is not a jovial village sheriff but an entire, impersonal city police force. Everyone always remembers the freezing instant when Buster appears all alone, a tiny figure at a distant crossroads, before the buffalo herd of policemen tear into the shot. But by this time Buster is inadvertently a thief (he thinks he has bought the load of furniture he is placidly trundling through the town) and inadvertently a bomb-thrower. The chase ends in triumph: all the cops in the police station, and the lone figure slipping out and locking the door behind him. Then along comes the girl, tosses her head, and Buster goes quietly back inside. To what doom is suggested by the last shot, of his tombstone.

Everything in *Cops* follows from Buster's righteous desire to please the girl and become a man of property. Having acquired the horse and cart, he at once converts it (as he does the balloon in *Balloonatics*) into a comfortable travelling home, littered with useful gadgets. He strikes up an endearing relationship with the barmy horse—the trusty, shambling grey, Onyx. In fact, he's an innocent householder, whose temporary home just happens to be wedged into the traffic jam of the police parade. The chase in *Cops* is not punctuated by the checks and whims of *The Goat*: this is Buster in full flight. And the coda—an exception to the rule that Keaton films have happy endings—is not merely wry and disenchanted. It is annihilating.

The chase films, once launched, pick up their own momentum: there is no chance of Buster turning round to explain to any pursuer that he is a much misunderstood man. My own favourite among the shorts, *The Boat*, starts from another premise: Buster brings fate thundering down on his head by sheer mulish devotion to an idea of himself as a boating man. This time he's married, with a practically-minded wife, and two small sons who wear the same flat hats and the same air of resignation to the unexpected. In the first scene, Keaton hitches the boat he has been building to his car, starts it up—and very slowly, like a card-house, the family home crumbles as the boat is hauled out. This is not merely a comedian's destruction joke: as the whole front of the house comes adrift, the doll's house furniture ranged around the surviving walls looks as forlorn as the wreck of a blitzed building.

There follows one of the most celebrated of all Keaton scenes: Buster standing proudly on deck, everyone helping in the launching, and the boat rolling slowly down . . . and down . . . and down, until only the flat hat bobs on the waves. But finally, irrevocably, the *Damfino* sets sail, a typical Keaton mobile home, with collapsible funnels and ropes to pull when passing under bridges. Mother cooks leather-hard pancakes; to spare her feelings the family, as one man, hide them under their hats. Then comes bedtime (the children wearing their hats with their nightshirts); and then the storm. Buster packs

"COLLEGE".





"BATTLING BUTLER": WITH SALLY O'NEILL, SNITZ EDWARDS.

the others into a cupboard and settles down to fight it, upside down on his wildly tilting ship. And again it isn't exactly—or entirely—funny. There's the despairing, surrealist radio signal to the coastguard. "*Damfino*," Keaton identifies himself. "Well if you don't, how can I?" is the only answer. And the characteristic moment when Keaton, bailing out with a teacup, suddenly reaches the point beyond sanity. Reason visibly snaps: the thing to do with a teacup is to drink out of it, not try to stem a flood, so he takes a gloomy swig.

Down goes the *Damfino*; her crew pile into a small bathtub, their last floating home. And then the younger boy, a true Keaton child if ever there was one, very gleefully pulls out the plug. Buster can do no more; but fate can, and the family walk from their foundering bathtub on to dry land. It is dark, lonely, a strange beach at night. They have lost the safety of home, and the dream of life at sea. Where are they going? *Damfino*.

The Boat has all the resilience, pig-headedness, and strangeness of the best Keaton films. It ends perfectly; but if it were to go on one has no doubt that this extraordinary family (wife and children behave like extensions of Keaton himself) would next be found setting up some ultra-ingenious desert island shack. The survival power of the Keaton character is never seriously in question. But the element of melancholy—Agee went so far as to call it melancholia—still bites. Keaton's humour is seldom destructive except at his own expense; and the collapse of the house at the beginning of *The Boat* seems to me one of the most strangely and sorrowfully and totally comic moments in cinema.

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By now, the principles of Keaton films were set—of Keaton, that is, looked on as director rather than performer. There are obvious rules of construction, like the slow starts and all-out finishes. But I would suggest three basic elements of Keaton comedy, all in evidence in *The Boat*. First, there is the concern with plot, adventure, real hazards. I find the storm sequence reminiscent, of all unlikely things, of the hurricane in *Alone on the Pacific*, a comparison one could never begin to make if Buster were just a booby adrift in a studio mock-up boat. Second, there is the sense of place. In *The Boat* this is no more than the modest little harbour whose yachts and boat-houses can be seen in the background of the launching sequence. But if this scene were staged in a studio tank, it could become just a pretty gag. Here it acquires the utter lunacy of some freakish happening in real life.

In other films, background takes on more value: the dusty, countrified streets of small towns, the Model Ts racing down country lanes, the railroad always somewhere near the centre of town. (*Bonnie and Clyde* shots, one now finds oneself thinking, in an absurd time switch.) Even in the two-reelers, Keaton was clearly prepared to go to great trouble for the sake of a single shot: there's an extraordinary one, for instance, in *The Paleface*, which finds him on horseback in

the middle of a great misty landscape of oil derricks, like something out of *The Red Desert*. But more significant than this is the sense of a world beyond the comedy: the river settlement of *Steamboat Bill*, the orchard alongside the millionaire's ornate encampment in *Battling Butler*. *Steamboat Bill* contains a shot which seems quintessential Keaton. He is standing in the foreground, gazing mournfully out at us; behind him, unobserved, the heroine has crept up and is dithering about whether to attract his attention. She is on the right of the frame; backwards to the left stretches the riverside path, with people wandering about. The moment is caught and framed by the unconcerned presence of other people.

The third obvious Keaton principle is his fondness for keeping as much of the action as possible within a shot. It started, presumably, with a natural pride in letting the audience see that those leaps and falls and glissades of movement were all his own work. There could be no cutting, because to cut into the action would suggest a cheated effect. In *College*, when he's pretending to be no athlete, he runs towards the camera down a line of hurdles, knocking down every one; in *Steamboat Bill* he stands stock still while the falling house collapses around him; in *Seven Chances* he dances about the screen, slipping and dodging under a rain of falling boulders. He was prepared to risk his neck for an effect which might last twenty seconds on the screen. The camera had to get far enough back to take it all in, to exploit a connoisseur's satisfaction in the number of ways of staging a fall. And so he hit on the technique which happens to be most in line with modern, or at least 1960s, aesthetics. (It's interesting, though quite profitless and abstract, to speculate on whether this could have anything to do with the fact that at long last he seems to be *everyone's* favourite comedian.)

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Though no one could call Keaton a theoretician of comedy, every published interview suggests that he had a total grasp of what he wanted to do, how an effect would come across, and what he expected from his co-directors. In his performances, he liked to build pyramids of action. He falls off a roof; gets caught up on a projecting pole; is catapulted off that into a room; slides along the floor; snatches at what turns out to be a fireman's pole; slithers down that to ground level, and is at once off again. Here each cut flicks the action forward, so that the whole lunatic route from top to bottom of the building is as neat as an equation. But effects like this are perhaps less characteristic than the moments when the

PROPOSAL ON A GOLF COURSE: "SEVEN CHANCES".





PARKING TICKET FOR A COW IN "GO WEST".

camera simply pauses, at a distance, waiting for Buster to emerge head first from a window or dash down a street.

What distinguishes his feature films qualitatively from each other is partly the sheer flow of comic invention (inexhaustible in *Seven Chances*, decidedly sparse in *Battling Butler*), and partly the extent to which he managed fully to realise a character. *The Three Ages*, for instance, is so limited by its parody form that it virtually breaks down into three interlocked two-reelers. Marvellous jokes—the first sight of Wallace Beery riding the mastodon, answered by Buster in his sea captain attitude on the back of a brontosaurus; the golf swing with the stone age club; his consternation when surrounded by those Thurberesque neanderthal women. But this is basic Buster; not much more.

So, though the college sweater and Harold Lloyd stance make a difference, is *College*—again tied to a rather rudimentary comic idea, about the bookish student, the least popular boy in the school, who wants to be an athlete. One sequence is as exhilaratingly daft as anything in Keaton: his hopeless imitation of the dashing sodajerk, which ends with the milk-shake being slid nonchalantly along the counter—straight into the customer's lap. And the scene in which he practises javelin-throwing (an immense wind-up, and the javelin thudding into the ground all of six inches in front of his feet) and pole-vaulting is a charming and very funny resumé of all college boy pictures. Again, the scene is made not just by the little ludicrously striving figure in the foreground, but by the feeling of space in the great empty stadium, with dusk coming on and the girl watching from the entrance.

For variations in Keaton comedy, however, the three films I'm inclined to look at (keeping, that is, to the newcomers of this season) are *Seven Chances*, *Go West* and *Steamboat Bill Jr.* Here character really comes into its own; and a different character each time, even though all three films end identically with Buster coming out on top after his three most extravagant action sequences.

Seven Chances is very 1920s: even given the wholly American setting, one thinks of this Buster as rather a P. G. Wodehouse young man, amiably dronish, indolent but game, and at the mercy of his more resourceful friend. The plot is beautifully compact and simple: to inherit under the terms of an eccentric will, Buster must be married by seven o'clock that very day. Naturally, his first reaction is to antagonise the girl he really loves, by letting her think that any old wife will do. So the problem becomes the finding of any wife—first the complacent exploration of the resources of the country club; then the wilder accosting of any woman not positively maimed, under-age or black (Buster's horror when he finds he has been following a Negress is a typical joke from the less touchy Twenties); then the friend's newspaper advertisement which brings to the church a maenad horde of prospective brides.

The tempo builds with purposeful economy, from Buster's conviction that any girl will be delighted to have him, through his petulance at having actually to ask them, to the moment when, beside himself with frustration, he passes a horrified hand over his eyes when he finds he has been wasting time in fond looks at a hairdresser's dummy. Mulishness carries him defiantly on, but the very idea of women has become horrific. When he curls up and goes childishly to sleep in the church, it is clearly because he can't bear to go on looking at a world which contains so many of the unconscious enemy. When he wakes up, at the head of his grotesque and simpering congregation, the sense is not of bewilderment but of a nightmare realised.

Technically masterly though the chase is, it would have nothing like the effect without this preparation—the transition from a simple comedy task (get married by seven: nothing easier) to the moment, which comes sooner or later in any Keaton film, when reason has gone and only mad stubbornness survives. But it is the tea-party prattle of the ladies, the sight of the telephone girl reading *Three Weeks*, the look of

the golfers when Buster indecorously stages a proposal on the tee, which anchors the comedy to a time and place.

And then the chase: the usual flying figure in front, and the avenging army, looking in their cotton dresses and veils like some apparition from a child's Bible in pictures, thundering in pursuit through another nostalgic townscape. They hurtle over a football field, flattening both teams in their wake; they commandeer a tram, seize the controls of a crane. There's an instant of compunction when they think they've actually killed him. Then they are off again. The moment when the boulders take over the pursuit from the brides is rightly famous; and although it is known to be a last minute addition to the film, it heightens the sense that the pursuing forces (as in *Cops*) no longer belong to any controllable world. *Seven Chances* is beautifully rounded off, when Keaton rushes to the house of the once again faithful girl friend, hurdling all obstacles until he reaches the front gate. Reason is back in control: he will open it quietly like the docile citizen he really is. He does so; the latch attaches itself mysteriously to his jacket; and he arrives at the door dragging the whole gate behind him.

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Seven Chances is wildly funny, and misogynistic enough to remind one that Keaton, in the year it was made, might himself have been feeling somewhat beset by wives. In *Go West*, made later in 1925, he looks straight past the girl at the end, into the doting face of Brown Eyes, the cow he has rescued from the slaughter-house. Where *Seven Chances* is a mixture of social comedy and apprehensive farce, *Go West* is all charm, vulnerability (Keaton actually calls his own character Friendless), and a recapturing of innocence.

The opening establishes his character for the occasion: a down-and-out, lost in the city (again there is exemplary value in a single shot of a real, relentless city street), but emphatically no Chaplin tramp. In one of the most reflectively beautiful shots in any Keaton film, he sits gravely down in a freight-yard, going through the contents of a woman's handbag he has found until he comes on a tiny pearl-handled revolver. Suicide, one might say, flickers across his face. But instead he takes the pioneer route to the West; choosing his freight car with fastidious care, but sharing it with a load of barrels which lurch into instant motion.

His adjustment to the West is wary but practical: he fits his pearl-handled pistol into an outsize holster; solves the problem of how to get a bite of food away from the other cowboys; and takes up riding, with the saddle strapped, in what he obviously feels must be the most comfortable position for the horse, somewhere just above its tail. The rancher's daughter feels a mocking tenderness for this unlikely cow-puncher. But Buster has found Brown Eyes. Infinitely solicitous for the cow's welfare, he outfits her with a rakish pair of antlers, sits solemnly and expectantly waiting for her to milk herself. Hearing that she is destined for slaughter, he is for once stunned into inaction. If Keaton films can be divided into those in which he acts, and those in which he is acted upon, *Go West* is perhaps the one which leaves most to chance. It is only when he finds himself alone with the herd on a runaway train that he springs into whirling action, getting the train under control, letting out the cattle, marshalling them by giving them something red to chase, and finally leading his wayward herd full pelt to the stockyards.

This frenzied conclusion of *Go West* has its enchantments, like the shop-keeper opening his door on to a wild sea of cattle, the calf parading in the dress-shop window, or the moment when Keaton, in his red devil suit, has acquired a kind of kite-tail string of pursuing cops, each clinging to the jacket of the man in front. But by comparison with *Seven Chances*, the chase lacks impetus—partly, no doubt, because the women could be allowed to get completely out of hand, while even Keaton couldn't risk a real stampede. Also, until the end, it is not Buster himself who is menaced: he is simply in attendance on the herd's destructive progress, raising his hat civilly to one of their victims like a governess apologising for her charges.

Too much innocence finds Buster at a disadvantage: he is the active principle in his own films, and his form of action

includes a certain guile. *Go West* is not a sentimental film (unless one finds the whole notion of comedian and cow sentimental), since Keaton treats Brown Eyes with no more than the impatient protectiveness he extends to any heroine. But *Steamboat Bill Jr.* is the more complete film, not only because it's more inventive but because Buster is less lovable.

At the opening of *Steamboat Bill*, the camera moves classically across a wide riverside scene, checking for a moment to watch a man watching the water, and so giving the audience a point of perspective. Buster is the college-boy son of the old riverboat captain, a long-lost child whose return is eagerly awaited. The reunion is a crushing disappointment to both sides, and in the first scenes father takes command—dragging his distressingly prim and silly son off to the barber and the hat-shop and crushing his offending ukulele underfoot. The hat-changing scene is of course classic: the face stern and wild under an avalanche of stetsons or bowlers or panamas, while the eyes keep sliding off towards the awful checked cap he has set his mind on.

From the moment when Buster meets the girl, the daughter of his father's rich rival, the relationship switches. The father's pathetic old family feud bores Buster: he is playing at being a naval officer, marching grandly, if unsteadily, around the old boat. His now fond father does small, kindly, protective things, like wiping the engine grease off his jacket or giving him a chew of tobacco—Buster keels right over from the impact of this offering. The sea-faring disguise, which obviously gives its wearer much fatuous pleasure, is short-lived. When Buster decides that he must at least make a grown-up effort to get his father out of jail, he is wearing plainer clothes, topped by a mournful upside-down umbrella. And now, with the work of establishing character completed, the wilder comedy can edge its way in; as it does in the jail-break scene, which finds Buster tenderly clutching a hollow loaf into which he has packed a whole set of escape tools.

Inevitably, the film moves into a climax of fantastic movement, with the hurricane replacing the chase. Buildings topple; the roof comes off a hospital, revealing Buster in bed with an ice-pack on his head; there's a surrealistic shot of the neat hospital bed sliding through a stable, past surprised horses. Like a man trying to fight a moving staircase, he slips and slithers in a sea of mud; suddenly he's in a theatre trying to take a dive through the backcloth; then heroically still under the falling house. The turning point in any Keaton climax comes when something triggers all his maniacal energy and resourcefulness into action. He rescues the girl, then drops her when he sees his father in his now floating prison. She essays a faint, but sits up abruptly when dropped: Keaton heroines need to keep their heads.

Steamboat Bill contains practically every element of Keaton comedy: the physical helplessness, transformed to perfect coordination when his mind is set on some practical purpose, such as a rescue; the self-contained one-shot joke, or the chain-reaction joke, like the scene at the station when father and son are both peering warily at any number of unlikely men wearing white carnations; the machine joke, when he runs up an elaborate set of ropes and pulleys to equip the boat for rescue. It also finds Keaton in one of his happiest settings, the Mark Twain country where the spruce steamer and the rusty paddleboat glower at each other across the water.

This was the last of the independent comedies; he joined M-G-M, made *The Cameraman*, and found himself in a studio world where "You had to requisition a toothpick in triplicate." If one follows Rudi Blesh's biography, Thalberg's beautifully polished studio machine was the real destructive force in Keaton's career. And the more one sees of the great comedies, the more one realises how essentially Keaton needed the freedom not to create gags, but to create worlds. The wistful cow-puncher, mounting his horse by rope-ladder; the college boy doing an immense run-up to the high jump, only to have the bar topple off as he gets there; the snappish young businessman snatching back his tip from the hatcheck girl; the running figure on top of the train, all owe part of their comic truth to their settings. Arbuckle understood his partner when he said that Buster "lived in the camera."



John Russell Taylor

"It is a mistake to think that modern taste is really represented by Corbusier rooms, furnished with fitting mechanical austerity. Modern taste is to be found far more in the typical post-war room, in which an Adam mantelpiece is covered with negro masks while Victorian wool-pictures jostle the minor Cubists on the walls. In such a room a Picasso reproduction is not considered 'amusing' unless flanked by pampas grass or surrounded by a Gothic frame made out of walnut shells, any more than a Brancusi bird is considered 'amusing' unless set off by a cage of stuffed tits, and an effigy of Queen Victoria. To the post-war intellectual snob all periods are equally *vieux jeu*, including his own, and it is only by rushing from one period to another that he can disguise from others and from himself his essentially static intelligence."

SOUNDS, DOESN'T IT, rather like a description of scenes from *What's New, Pussy Cat?* or *Help!*, and it is only by an effort of the historical imagination that we may guess the writer to be Constant Lambert, the war mentioned that of 1914-1918, and the period he is wittily castigating the 1920s, from the vantage point of 1934. Hater of pastiche that he was, he would no doubt find even more material for abuse in our present popular aesthetic. Everything he wrote in *Music Ho!* about his age's passion for time-travelling in the arts is even more sharply relevant today; only today, of course, the minor Cubists and the Brancusi, along with the 'architectural experiments of Corbusier and Mallet-Stevens' which he approvingly opposed to the 'Olde Worlde Bunne Shoppe' style, have themselves joined the ranks of the period and the 'amusing', so many props to be manipulated, manoeuvred and divertingly combined into the latest camp extravaganza.

Where things differ today is that Lambert had something rather like classical, humane standards to fall back on. His main objection to neo-classical Stravinsky, for instance, was that he used odds and ends of eighteenth-century style for

purposes quite different from those the eighteenth century would have recognised: "Like a savage standing in delighted awe before those two symbols of an alien civilisation, the top hat and the *pot de chambre*, he is apt to confuse their functions." The position is strictly speaking an anti-decadent one, given that the hallmark of decadence, in the arts as in political and social institutions, is the transformation of means into ends, of functional process into ritual. But the force of the argument depends entirely on our accepting that there is something wrong (rather than merely inefficient) about confusing a top hat with a *pot de chambre*. And as the 1960s stagger dopily towards the 1970s, that is something which fewer and fewer of us would let pass without question: the colour supplements and television have taught us more sophisticated standards. Who cares what it was meant for; this way it's more *fun*.

Which perhaps explains some of the odder phenomena observable in films, television, commercial design and interior decoration today. Consider, for instance, an episode of *Haunted* on television the other week. It concerned itself with the guilty obsession of an ordinary self-made businessman who had married (unhappily) above himself, with the memory of his snooty dead wife. And the pair were seen living in an extremely stylish pseudo-Mackintosh art nouveau house, beautifully kept up in period. What were we supposed to conclude about them from their physical surroundings? That they were extremely trendy in their tastes? Certainly not that, since they were shown as being very stodgy and conventional. That they were extremely conservative, and clung therefore to the styles in vogue in their parents' day? Again, surely not: to begin with, the style was right out by 1910. And when in, it was supported only by an eccentric and self-consciously artistic minority, not certainly by ordinary middle-class people in the English midlands. But if neither of these, then what?

The answer, I suppose, is nothing. I hardly think the

ABOVE: FASHION PARADE IN WILLIAM KLEIN'S "WHO ARE YOU, POLLY MAGGOOT?"

explanation lies in the sort of ambitious ignorance which persuaded those responsible for Ken Russell's fantasia on the life of Rossetti to set some key scenes of the later pre-Raphaelite heyday in front of a house very evidently built by Voysey or one of his followers a generation later. There they clearly thought they were doing something which they weren't. The only idea in the mind of the design team responsible for *Haunted*, I am sure, was to beguile our eyes with the most 'amusing', attention-catching sets they could devise, and never mind about whatever puny drama might be enacted in front of them. And that, like it or not, is very much the approach of the Sixties.

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It is an eclectic approach, and the predominant quality is backward-looking, travelling in time rather than space. That would seem to suggest that it is nostalgic, but I wonder. Of course all coherent movements of stylistic revival involve some sort of nostalgia, usually for something which never existed anyway. Pugin's Gothic revivalism looked back to a sort of ideal, devout, harmonious Middle Ages which never existed, just as the Classical revivalism of a few centuries earlier looked back to a balanced, reasonable Antique Golden Age which was just as much a figment of modern imaginations. Both these movements stemmed essentially from a lack of confidence in the present. But there are other sorts of stylistic retrospection which seem to reflect no localised dissatisfaction at all. That described by Constant Lambert is one. The complex of styles and motifs summoned up by the words 'Great Exhibition' is another. And our own situation is I think a third.

The keynote in all three cases is an exclusive preoccupation with accidents at the expense of substance. A work like Owen Jones's monumental *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) might stand as bible for them all. Jones was not interested in the spirit of Gothic, or Greek, or for that matter Celtic or Chinese or Rococo or any of the other styles he classified and displayed. He provided a decorative vocabulary in which no terms were 'better' or 'worse' than any other. Nor were any necessarily incompatible with any other: they might be mixed and combined in any way that struck the designer as—well, a mid-Victorian would probably not say 'amusing', but perhaps 'striking', 'interesting', even 'educational'.

What all this suggests is really the opposite of nostalgia. Rather, it is a total lack of concern for anything but the present, the here-and-now. Owen Jones, one might say, was so sure that his own was the best possible age, or at least so totally uninterested in questioning the matter, that he regarded the decorative styles of other times and places as so many tools in the hands of his contemporaries, nothing more. The mid-Victorian age did not need to demonstrate its identity by setting out deliberately to evolve a style of its own: its identity existed, for all to see, and would shine through whatever style of clothing it happened to wear. To Pugin and many other earnest neo-Goths of the time, the age often committed that worst of artistic sins: if it was doing the right Gothic thing, it was probably doing it for the wrong eclectic reason. In comparison, the Nineties, often then and since labelled Decadent, was nothing of the kind: despite the obvious eclecticism of individuals such as Beardsley, the main artistic pursuit of the whole Art Nouveau movement was a very serious quest of a new style, fresh, modern, and self-consciously expressive of that age and no other. But the 1920s brought a new eclecticism, more frivolous no doubt but no less far-reaching than that of the 1850s and 1860s. The Modern Movement might be sternly striding along some functional high road, but the wild and fancy disguises of the 1925 Arts-Déco exhibition in Paris were much closer to the real tone of the times.

And so, surely, it is today. Obviously there are a few things which could be associated with a clear and specific nostalgia: the transient vogue for old military uniforms as everyday wear for the young last year, for example, could be seen as a vague but unmistakable harking back to the great days of British imperialism, a mythical Edwardian era compounded of Lutyens, Elgar and a perpetual Durbar somewhere east of

Suez. And so it might have been, except that a nostalgia of that sort can hardly arise, be satisfied and vanish again in about three months; not if it means anything at all, it can't. Easier, therefore, and more sensible, to see the pseudo-military thing as just another collection of decorative motifs, to be toyed with for as long as it stayed unborning and then dropped: no more meaningful, in fact, than the sprouting of jackets in William Morris fabrics last summer, the Indian flimsies of early autumn, the *Bonnie and Clyde* look of today, or the 'Moroccan shepherd-boy look' which several West End stores are urging on their female customers as the trendiest thing imaginable right this moment.

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The only important difference, in fact, between the 1960s and the 1920s or the 1850s is that the cycle of fashion, speeded by colour supplements, television and even the cinema, revolves that much faster, like one of those wretched silent-film-at-sound-speed sequences our more tiresome new film-makers have been plaguing us with for the last five years or so. Significantly, the cinema comes fairly low down the list of trend-setters. The most obvious reason for this is the time factor. A new vogue is born, and actuality television is reporting it to us within hours. A month or so, and the colour supplements are on to it. But by the time a film has gone through all the processes from script to screen the big new thing is likely to be thoroughly old hat. The whole myth of swinging London was exploded nearly eighteen months ago, but films reporting on it excitedly, like *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*, or with a tiny measure of timid irony, like *Smashing Time*, are still only just arriving on West End screens.

The only thing the film can still do in this field is occasionally create vogues of its own, things which actually start with the emergence of the film. The *Bonnie and Clyde* craze is a case in point; more by accident presumably than design, the film hit just right, chiming with a nascent Thirties move in graphic design, a big revival of interest in genuine films of the Thirties. Timing, as ever, was of the essence: the musical in which Sandy Wilson tried to set the same thing in motion, *Divorce Me Darling*, came just that vital year or so too early, and flopped. Even a few months can do it: *The Avengers*, in its Honor Blackman days, struck lucky by deliberately inventing for its heroine a new look in clothes, the black leather look, which happened to catch on when the series was shown. *Who Are You, Polly Maggoo?* falls foul of a timelag, so that the notion of metal clothes for women, engagingly preposterous no doubt when the film was made, is already familiar as an accomplished fact by the time it arrives here.

But if films rarely manage any more to create fashions, they seem nevertheless unable to abjure altogether the delights of modishness. So when one sees a swinging new British movie, as like as not one will be regaled with all the stylistic trimmings which have come and gone in the last few months. Sometimes the film-makers seem to be sublimely unaware of how old-fashioned their references are. But what is perhaps even worse is a certain knowingness which pervades the work of the cannier directors. They realise that if they gamble all on Art Nouveau sets, or boys and girls in cast-off Guards uniforms, or psychedelic colour effects, in all probability by the time the film comes out the more with-it, colour-supplement-primed members of their audience will be saying "Oh, not that old thing again!" So instead of adopting any coherent stylistic pattern they throw in a bit of everything which is on the scene, or seems likely soon to be. Eclecticism compounding eclecticism, in fact.

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After all, in society at large things never move at a uniform tempo, so that while the high fashion style of two years ago—Art Nouveau, let us say—is just filtering into the semis along the by-pass, the *Observer* readers of Hampstead are gazing with quiet satisfaction on their collections of stripped-down Victorian furniture painted with Union Jacks, the with-it people (especially if they are with-money people too) are avidly in search of onyx-and-chrome, and the forward-lookers are

already hoarding Fougasse walls-have-ears posters and wondering what amusing things can be done with sandbags, Vera Lynn records and powdered egg. The would-be with-it film-maker knows this perfectly well, and knows that other people, sophisticated or merely bemused, will be hopefully ready to try a bit of everything. So he does not try to make a style or to reflect any particular style. Or to deal with characters who exist in a certain place, at a certain time, and therefore lead lives which are reasonably all-of-a-piece stylistically, if only in their absence of style. Instead, he tries to keep us guessing with a constant dazzle of stylistic reference, half-straight, half-ironic, full of get-out clauses if anyone asks awkward questions.

The criterion of relevance is outdated and inapplicable: as well ask what the abstract patterns of colour thrown on to the walls at a psychedelic happening mean as enquire why the hero's home in *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* is decorated as it is or what conceivable reason he might have for dreaming in terms of parody silent film. The hero's home, like his family, is a miscellaneous collection of casual references meant vaguely to suggest stuffy, convention-ridden lower-middle-classness. The silent film bit is there, not because it means anything in terms of the dreamer's character or background (the nearest he would have got to a silent film, surely, is viewing *The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film* at his mother's knee), but because, ever since *Zazie dans le Métro*, this particular technique has been associated in British film-makers' minds, and therefore, I take it they suppose, in the minds of their audiences, with advanced, free-wheeling cinema. It is merely a gesture in the audience's direction, and I am sure Clive Donner is perfectly unaware that by this time it is a gesture of decidedly dubious import.

But here we come upon another aspect of the present stylistic tangle: the way that nearly everything is second-hand, and people seem to survive primarily by taking in each other's washing (there is a nastier, apter image, but it is perhaps a trifle too unkind). Hardly anything comes from first-hand observation. The speeded-up motion in *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* is there, one feels, not because Clive Donner has observed this effect himself in real silent films played at sound speed, and has thought it funny (let alone because it has any more specific relevance to the scene in hand), but because he has seen it in other modern films.

When the posters for the Iris Murdoch play *The Italian Girl* centre on a twirly-swirly pattern of faces and formalised hair, straight out of the Vienna Secession, any connection with the play is purely coincidental. The inspiration does not seem, either, to come from any direct contact with real Art Nouveau, but rather from the prevalence of Elliott shoe ads on the London Underground, setting the pattern for trendy advertising (advertising, that is, as something trendy in itself, and wholly divorced from the product). More jazz-modern decors derive from Assheton Gorton's gleeful fantasia on the style in the film of *The Knack* (which was at least directly and lovingly observed, and sort of relevant) than ever came from the real thing, which many of those responsible mightn't recognise anyway. It is ironic that when *Smashing Time* opened, all high-Thirties graphics and Jean Harlow styles in psychedelic colours, it should be at the Odeon, Leicester Square, just stripped for the occasion of all its Thirties splendours of veneer and chrome to make—the Rank Organisation thought—a bright, modern cinema.

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The strip-cartoon thing which seems inescapable at the moment provides perhaps the most enlightening spectrum of attitudes. To Resnais the strip cartoon is both a source of genuine nostalgia and, more importantly perhaps, a pointer towards a new pictorial syntax; his interest is both lovingly knowledgeable and crisply analytic. Godard no doubt knows what Resnais thinks about the strip cartoon, and has absorbed it, but his most vivid use of it is to give immediate visual impact. As in Resnais, whatever he has learnt, he has learnt thoroughly and absorbed to the point where it is no longer

recognisable. Jessua, in *Jeu de Massacre*, is a step further along the line: his interest is partly sociological—the influence of comic strip content—and partly picturesque—the strips as colourful and exotic visual material.

Roy Lichtenstein—well, he is more of a problem. His interest in comic strips is I think entirely visual: they represent certain visual formulas, they make use of certain shapes and textures, which have not previously been assimilated into 'fine' art, or had not been when he began to paint in this style around 1961. (Ironically, the fevered discussions the comic-strip paintings provoked during the Lichtenstein exhibition at the Tate quite omitted to remark that he stopped painting like this about three years ago, and his latest works are paintings and sculptures inspired by, yes, the modernistic Radio City Music Hall style of the 1930s—no doubt the controversy about that will come in another five years' time.) Anyway, on the whole it seems that Lichtenstein's interest in comic strips is more than merely modish—after all, he helped largely to create the mode. But what then of the self-conscious revivers of the strip cartoon itself in France, like the authors of the notorious *Barbarella* ("Sexy, licentious, banned in France! Order under plain cover now!")? And what of Roger Vadim, busy filming *Barbarella* as a pastiche of a pastiche, a parody of a parody, the trendiest movie yet, if the wind doesn't change first?

* * *

Amid so much window-dressing in assorted styles, coming round inexorably again and again (it is rather touching for an old person like myself to find the fetiches of his undergraduate days fourteen or fifteen years ago, the Jessie Matthews records and Beardsley prints, being dusted off and restored to favour yet again as *The Boy Friend* returns to the boards as an early-Fifties period piece), it is refreshing to find at least an occasional example of a direct and even innocent response. At least, I thought so when I saw the Beatles' much publicised creation *Magical Mystery Tour* on BBC Television (colour-less, I should add). Hardly anyone seems to have agreed with me, but the more carefully one examines the violent attacks the show received, the clearer it is that what was found unforgivable was precisely the show's lack of the sort of fence-sitting knowingness which I find so tiresome in a lot of the new British cinema. It had a quality which can only be called genuinely primitive, and the critics resented it. How dare they offer us this, was the cry, when with all that money and power they could have bought the best talents to give us a glossy professional job?

But that, really, was the point. What makes the finale touching, for instance, is the genuine feeling that comes over for the Thirties musical. The song, 'Your Mother Should Know', has it, and so does the way, home-movie as it is, that the number was staged: a humble and rather naïve tribute to Busby Berkeley, but put there, clearly, because the Beatles care for Busby Berkeley, not because it was the smart, swinging thing to do. Am I making that elementary Romantic error, confusing incompetence with sincerity? I don't think so: a lot of *Magical Mystery Tour* was just bad, boring and shapeless and pointless. But the styles which were aped—lush romanticism for 'The Fool on the Hill', Lesterian collage for 'I Am the Walrus'—seemed to be used because they meant something to the film's makers, to express a genuine nostalgia or a real aspiration.

The cinema used as an incomparable new box of toys for advanced 1968 infants? Certainly. Eclectic and derivative? Of course. But even eclecticism can sometimes be the vehicle of true feeling, and for all its weaknesses the Beatles' harmless, unassuming little film leaves a lot of the big, self-appointed trend-setters, the *Mulberry Bushes* and *Poor Cows* and *Billion Dollar Brains*, looking very hollow. And, worst of all possible charges, old-fashioned. Real, felt nostalgia or accurate realistic observation of something which is in itself transient does not date. But once dismiss dramatic relevance and personal response from your artistic resources, and you are left only with the instant frisson, the 'fun' and the outrage, as criteria of judgment. And nothing is quite so dead and dreary as last year's fad.



**Above: Lynn Redgrave
in "Smashing Time".**

**Left: Jane Fonda in
Vadim's comic strip
extravaganza,
"Barbarella".**

**Right: The Beatles in
"Magical Mystery
Tour".**

**Below right: comic strip
image by Guy Peellaert
in Jessua's "Jeu de
Massacre".**



Elliott Stein

DR. LEDOUX'S TORTURE GARDEN

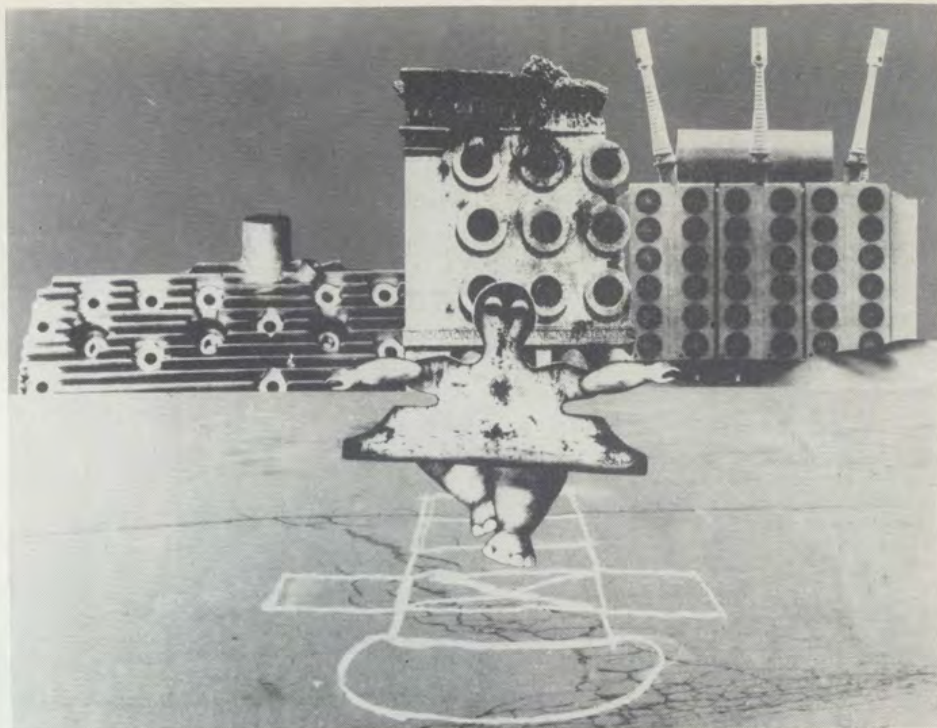
MORE WENT ON AT the Fourth Experimental Film Competition than the eye could meet. Electronic siren sounds beamed out by the Royal Belgian Film Archive had again lured several hundred bemused visitors from all over the planet; they found themselves shored up against North Sea elements in the vast haunted Knokke-le-Zoute Palace for an icy Christmas coven of pandemic 'happenings', scuffles, skirmishes, daily political infighting, hallucinatory sound effects from dawn to dawn, and profuse nudities of every kith and kidney. Late after midnight, in the 'room beyond the mirror', an oval sanctum frescoed with Magritte surrealisms, 'Skoobfilms' came popping out of the woodwork—these were mixed-media affairs with dancing projected erotic dots outlining real live human beings wrapped from top to toe in nothing but books, tearing off each other's pages with distressing languor.

The main entrance was vaulted by an enormous 'movie-movie', a 40-foot-tall inflated plastic dome at which four projectors blasted simultaneously, inhabited by writhing young people in a state of advanced unguarded nakedness. A minatory loudspeaker voice requested guests to snatch the film from projectors and destroy it, should the Maoists present succeed in mixing pro-Chinese propaganda in any of the media at hand. A visit to the information desk might mean a stumble over Yoko Ono (the Sadoul of bare bottoms) who was lying there in a black bag—you might not have known it, except for a large sign reading 'Yoko Ono is *not* here.' Cannes and Venice have starlets; Knokke had its Maoists—a fuzzy bunch of French and German activists lolling, picnicking all over the place, armed with cowbells to toll during films not made according to their taste. If provoked, they rose from the floor to wave an anti-American banner faster than Casino officials could rip it down.

* * *

There were a few films too—nearly 200 of them, a good many mere dotty-blotty poltergeists of films, scratching and screaming rapes on eye and ear, some gone before you could sneeze, others lingering on for hours. A handful were exciting, adventurous works which justified Knokke's agonies and ecstasies. It was quite another handful which took the main prizes, however. For the record, they were:

—\$4,000 Gevaert-Agfa Grand Prix: *Wavelength* (U.S.A.) made by Michael Snow, a prodigy of pedantically minimal art. An immobile camera zooms ever so slowly from one end of a long room towards a very far wall. No change of angle, and nothing of interest occurs—to the tune of a soundtrack of sine waves (a bat noise out of hell) increasing to 12,000 cycles per second, enough to do permanent damage to eardrums belonging to anyone who could abide with this one trip across one room lasting close to one hour. Its defenders (among them Jacques Ledoux, head of the Belgian Cinémathèque and master of Knokke's sesquipedalian ceremonies) put forth *Wavelength* as a triumph of 'contemplative' cinema. Perchance, but the triumph would have been more complete had there been something there to contemplate.



WINZENTSEN'S "ERLEBNISSE DER PUPPE".

—Four other main prizes (\$2,000 each) went to Lutz Monmartz for *Selbstschüsse* (Germany), Robert Nelson for *The Grateful Dead* (U.S.A.), Ake Arenhill for *Besoket* (Sweden) and to Stephen Dwoskin for the ensemble of his work. *Selbstschüsse* is a yawny gambol: its ungainly director 'shoots' himself, self-indulging his grimaces as he runs through a field with hand-held camera, occasionally tossing it into the air for added effect. Home movies made in the fields still look like home movies. *Grateful Dead* is an impressionistic view of the American pop group; *Besoket* an arty science fiction piece, with visitors from outer space wandering in overexposed landscapes—someone seems to have dropped a print of Chris Marker's *La Jetée* into a washing machine. Dwoskin is a young American, now working in London. His obsessions run to lonely women who lie in bed and moan, and lesbians playing Chinese checkers. They did not seem to me to be worth \$2,000.

Two minor prizes went to estimable works, both American: Dorothy Wiley's haunting *Fog Pumas*, and Martin Scorsese's *The Big Shave*. The latter is a single-character plum of black humour—a pleasant young man wakes up one morning, goes into the bathroom and cheerfully begins shaving. He shaves himself to death.

The awards betokened the jury's preference for films in which *intent* of formal originality was prized above other qualities, no matter how limited the goal or muddled the result. Thus, several ambitious and successful entries received no prize: Winzentsen's *Erlebnisse der Puppe* (Germany), a delightful trick film—the adventures of an odd anvil-shaped creature with elephant legs who struts about kicking up mayhem in a collage universe; Schmidt's *Bodybuilding* (Austria), the most beautiful of all the 'happening' series—a contorted rhapsody of bodies manipulated as artefacts in the atelier of Viennese painter Otto Mühl. *The Embryo* (Koji Wakamatsu, black and white Scope), a fascinating study in psychopathology, was the best feature, the most accomplished work in competition. *Embryo* turned out to be the main target of the Maoist louts. These self-appointed censors marched on stage and blocked the screen for half an hour, waving their arms and grunting 'Révolution Culturelle!'

No rival was in sight for Sweden's *Anima Mundi* (Erling Johansson) as best short by a new director. Rows of weird elemental archaic figures sit hunched at looms, monotonously spinning away their lives in this Jungian tone poem. These figures hatch an army of dolls who ally themselves with swarms of birds to make war on the spinners. Shot in the Lapland hamlet where the director was born (villagers still live there as in the past, stultified by the commandments of a



LLOYD WILLIAMS' "LINE OF APOGEE".

fanatical religious sect), *Anima Mundi* is on a simple symbolic level a vision of the generation war: the dolls are young villagers, struggling to leave and break with the past. Its strength is a stark plastic style and compulsively hammered editing. Johansson has made what looks like a James Whale horror film choreographed by Busby Berkeley.

Lloyd Williams' *Line of Apogee* (U.S.A.) is an ambitious exercise in soft-edge surrealism, more arresting than any of the prize-winners, with a directorial backbone lacking in most of the other American entries. (The hippy contingent, in particular, would be well advised to 'Make Love, Not Films.') James Broughton's *The Bed* (U.S.A.), his first effort in fifteen years, was awaited with curiosity. It proved a cloyingly cute ragbag of cuddling.

There were more nude scenes at Knokke than a regiment of Daughters of the American Revolution could shake sticks at. Even so, one evening at mid-festival point, an essay in nakedness escalation occurred when a herd of people stampeded out of the Casino's official show and recessed to the quarters of juror Shirley Clarke at a nearby hotel. They had been promised a peek at some really 'way out' movies made by members of the Living Theatre. Such throngs jammed into Clarke's place that there was no room for the projector. A bed sheet was hurriedly taken out into the hotel corridor and nailed to the wall near the lifts. Staid residents of the Résidence Albert could then only regain their rooms by trampling on dozens of entranced cinephile squatters who were vainly trying to decode the sex of the sickly green wiggling forms out of focus on the bed-sheet of the director of *Portrait of Jason*.

The management, in desperation, 'blew' the light fuses, and the couple of befogged Belgian bobbies who had been called in to restore order were obviously embarrassed and outnumbered; they sheepishly contented themselves with counting the members of the newly formed Hotel Corridor Film Society. SIGHT AND SOUND's man exited as Number 73. What is really striking about this incident is that the official showing

which the group had deserted in quest of less standard fare was an engagingly forthright homosexual Belgian film (*Possession du Condamné*, directed by Albert-André Lheureux) based on Genet. In it, a clutch of young men, naked as worms, cavort amorously in a churchyard. At previous Knokkes, *Condamné* itself would surely have been condemned to a furtive screening in hotel corridors. Had one, at the Albert this year, been present at the birth of the under-underground film?

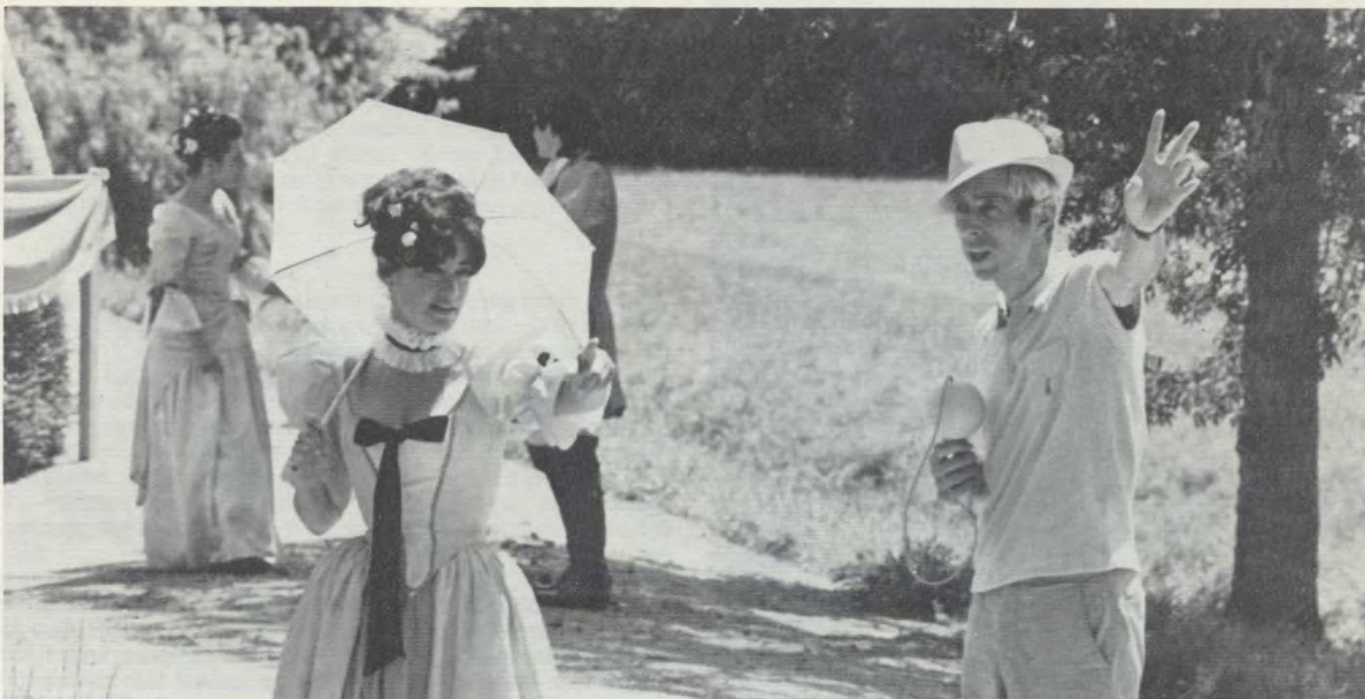
* * *

If the avant garde did not seem very avant garde, it was not the fault of the festival's organisers, who had supplied a liberal framework and a generous amount of raw stock donated by Gevaert-Agfa to film-makers. Parisian journalists covering Knokke were patronising in the extreme (in France it is standard practice to treat Belgium as a sort of cultural poor relation), but although this was not a vintage year at Knokke, the breadth of free expression enjoyed there would be unthinkable anywhere in Gaullist France, publicly or privately, and least of all, as in this case, with government sponsorship.

In the event, all that France had to send to Knokke was a gang of troublemakers and Marcel Hanoun's *L'Authentique Procès de Carl-Emmanuel Jung*. Its director describes *Jung* as a 'three-dimensional puzzle in which the audience finds itself drawn by a latent subjectivity and propelled into centripetal osmosis.' The film is even less droll than it sounds. Its point of departure is the trial of an imaginary war criminal, an inoffensive-looking intellectual who likes Bach and Gluck. The unpromising clichés of this premise are compounded by a glacially calculated 'distancing' construction: the dialogue is supposed to be in German, but we are hearing the trial in French translation in the court, so lips are out of synch with speech and the film deliberately looks badly dubbed. The word 'Jew' is never used; it is repeatedly replaced by 'foreigner'. In spite of these and other 'osmoses', Hanoun's work was as boring as most of the main prizes; that it did not win one was one of the least interesting of Knokke's mysteries.

Seventy pictures were seen out of competition. Best of the lot, and the funniest intentionally funny film, was Gianfranco Baruchello's *La Verifica Incerta*, a clever *tour de force* in which odds and ends of several dozen Fox CinemaScope action epics have been re-edited to make something which looks like a mystic marriage of *Intolerance* and *Duck Soup*. John Latham's *Speak* (G.B.) was the best of the dancing dot opuses, and *Gavotte*, the most recent live action short of Polish cartoonist Walerian Borowczyk, a delight in every department. This is really effective minimal art—hatching a comic and very human masterpiece with just a talented dwarf, seven feet of wall space and a table.

A piece of resistance of sorts was provided by the European première of Don Levy's *Herostratus*, a baroque display of wild talent, made with the aid of the BFI's Production Board. Main character Max (he really should have been named Morgan Privilege) is an angry narcissistic young poet who cuts his flat up piece by piece, and runs through London with an axe, bent on self-destruction. He decides to sell his suicide to a public relations firm, as some sort of comment on the ills of a society based on private gain. There is much more to the plot. Levy's *Leviathan* was well received by the hushed Knokke audience. At last (at a midnight show, after a 15-hour day put in at the experimental factory's assembly line of double exposures signifying nothing) here was a story one could sink one's teeth into. But it lasts 150 minutes: several pairs of huge dentures could be sunk into *Herostratus* and lost for ever. In spite of flaws, and perhaps even whole reels of excess baggage, the film is worth salvaging. As the dishevelled poet, Michael Gothard makes the most of a pretty impossible role. Levy's camera swoops after his hero's impressive dorsals and pectorals with more dogged fixity than von Sternberg ever devoted to Dietrich's hips and ankles, punching away at this windy parable with a manic drive nervously coherent to the disjointed psyche of masochistic Max. *Herostratus* runs around like a chicken with its head cut off—but it does run.



"BENJAMIN": MICHEL DEVILLE, WITH SCRIPTWRITER NINA COMPANEEZ, IN COSTUME FOR A WALK-ON PART.

IN THE PICTURE

Benjamin

MICHEL DEVILLE'S *Benjamin ou les Mémoires d'un Puceau*—this is the film that all Paris has been rushing to see since it opened on January 12. The first run seems likely to continue until June, and meanwhile the film is breaking all box-office records; there are long queues outside the Marivaux and the Bretagne, and at the George V extra seats are put in for every performance.

Public and critics are for once in agreement. The Delluc prize—the Goncourt of the French cinema—was awarded to *Benjamin* on the first ballot by a majority of 9 votes to 4 (the 4 being divided between *Tante Zita*, Challenge's grave and handsome first film *O'Salto*, and *L'Ecume des Jours*); and a glance at the newspapers shows the press to be almost unanimously complimentary.

For Robert Chazal (*France-Soir*), *Benjamin* is a roguish, provocatively elegant and

acidly witty *divertissement* set in the century of *marivaudage* and the *comédies galantes*. "The most delightful thing," Jean de Baroncelli writes in *Le Monde*, "is that you never feel you're watching a pastiche or a masquerade. Everything is natural, spontaneous and decidedly modern within its historical framework. One would have to be very contrary or very cross not to enjoy this voluptuously impertinent romp." Well, *Le Figaro's* Louis Chauvet must either be contrary or cross, for he provides the only discordant note in the general chorus of praise when he writes "... being rakish is not that easy... This is a long way from the grace of pastiche... a confused mixture of facile affectations, cheap mannerisms and silly tricks..."

For Pierre Billard (*L'Express*), *Benjamin* is first and foremost an excellent comedy: "the education of a doe-eyed ninny surrounded by a flock of swooning women eager to initiate him." Cruel and frivolous in its treatment of feelings? Quite possibly. But raffishness is perhaps but the mask of despair, and one may find a profound sadness in the film's gaiety. Michel Piccoli's appearance on the scene marks the arrival of Don Juan, restless and dissatisfied like Mozart's hero. So that, as Georges Charensol remarks in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, "this film, which starts out with a transparent brightness, becomes increasingly overcast and reveals a strange cruelty beneath its bland surface." We are no longer in the eighteenth century but the twentieth.

What these quotations fail to convey is the beauty of the settings, the sumptuousness of the costumes, the elegance of Deville's direction, and his marvellous way with actors (though Pierre Clémenti is debatable as Benjamin) and particularly actresses (Catherine Deneuve, Michèle Morgan, Odile Versois, Francine Bergé, etc.). But if one is pleased to see Deville at last bringing it off with this, his ninth film, one should not overlook the part played by Nina Companeez (daughter of Jean Companeez, himself scriptwriter of over a hundred films). Since she started in

1961, Nina Companeez has scripted all of Deville's films.

For him, film-making means the pleasure of shooting; for her, it's the chance to live twice. She gets caught up in what she imagines, living—as she admitted to me—a host of different lives. For both of them, at any rate, the secret lies in their affinity. By a lucky coincidence Nina writes the dialogue that Michel would like to write, and which he's happy not to have to, since this enables him to see it more critically.

Their aim is not simply to please, but to speak of love aggressively and lucidly; or as they put it, to create a cinema of emotional swordplay. What they're resisting is the mental anaesthesia of all those films that drift along in a pastel haze, trying to lull the public to sleep with their whispered refrain: you are happy. To do this, they've chosen the eighteenth century, because it is elegant, because they want the women to be as seductive, as well groomed and as beautiful as possible. Hence the deliberate sophistication (a simple form of affectation) and the moral gamesmanship. Basically the game consists of not talking seriously about serious things.

Since the famous partnerships between Carné and Prévert, between Aurenche, Bost and Autant-Lara, France has been without a real writer-director tandem. Our delight will hardly be impeded by the fact that the one we now have is looking for inspiration to Watteau and Fragonard, Fielding and Diderot, Boccherini and Mozart.

GILLES JACOB

Great Dane

LAST NOVEMBER the Danish Government Film Foundation distributed the annual quality prizes for a year's production. There was not much excitement about the prizes, the films were mediocre, and less money was given away than in previous years. The only inspiring thing in the whole ceremony was the announcement that the board of the Film Foundation had unanimously decided to give 3 million Kroner (£150,000) for the realisation of Carl Theodor Dreyer's film

on Christ, one of the most talked-of projects of the last twenty years. One of the first questions foreign cineastes coming to Denmark asked was, "What's happening about Dreyer's film on Christ?" And the fact that nothing was happening recently prompted Jean-Luc Godard to a melodramatic outcry: "Today Dreyer is a prisoner in the state of Denmark."

Sceptics could of course see the Film Foundation's offer, which was sanctioned by the Minister of Cultural Affairs, as a gesture and a means to stop the talking. Some said that the offer came too late; but at least that was not the fault of the Film Foundation, which has only been in existence for three years. The fact is that 3 million Kroner was the largest sum offered by the Foundation for any Danish film. And the money was not a loan, as is the case with other production aid. It was offered not to Dreyer personally but to the Danish production company which was willing to engage him; and of course the grant was not intended to cover all production costs.

Soon after the announcement of the offer, two Danish production companies told the Film Foundation that they were interested in considering it. The two companies were Nordisk Films, the oldest and largest of the Danish companies, and Mogens Skot-Hansen's small but ambitious Laterna Film, whose most recent effort is the production of Hjalmar Söderberg's *Dr. Glas*, directed by Mai Zetterling.

Dreyer himself was interviewed in the Danish press about his feelings. In his usual polite way he said that of course he was very happy and flattered by the offer, but he gently added that he didn't find it very realistic. He told the press that as long as twenty years ago the film's production cost had been estimated at between 3 and 5 million dollars, and he could not see how it was possible to make it on a modest Danish budget.

Since then nothing much has been heard about the offer and the project. In February I talked to Dreyer. He told me that he had not heard from any of the Danish companies, but he did not deplore that. He was absolutely sure that it was impossible to make the film on Christ for a Danish company, and he said it was a condition that the 3 million Kroner should be an integral part of the whole budget of the film. For Dreyer this was an impossible condition, but still he was pleased about the offer. He found it a stimulating gesture.

At the same time, Dreyer was very hopeful. He told me that in the last few months he had also been approached by RAI, the Italian State Television organisation, which offered him a chance of making the film—not for television, of course. I asked Dreyer if the Italians, who have visited him in Copenhagen, wanted to impose any conditions, and he said that they didn't. They would like to finance the film, they know about the twenty-year-old estimates, and they have not mentioned anything about a limited budget.

They know that he wants to shoot the film in Israel and to find suitable actors there, because first of all he wants to give his film a Jewish atmosphere. He would like to take to Israel some of the Danish technicians with whom he has worked on his last pictures. He is not interested in making a three hour film: his picture is intended to run about 110 minutes. He is not interested in CinemaScope, but would like to use a process like VistaVision and is especially eager to get a system which gives the best opportunity for deep focus camera-

work. Above all, he wants to shoot the film in colour. "I should not like to die before I have made at least one film in colour," he said. He planned *Gertrud* in colour, but the production company would not spend the money for it. Dreyer has very personal ideas about the use of colour—"but it's too early to reveal my intentions."

Dreyer tells me that until recently he had not looked at his script since he wrote it twenty years ago. Now he has read it again, and the Italians have read it. Dreyer himself proposed to them that he should shorten and concentrate the script. When I talked to him, he had just finished this work and was going to send the shortened script to Italy in an English translation. And now again Dreyer is waiting for an answer.

He told me, finally, that he had suggested to RAI that they should try to collaborate with one of the big American companies. He wants an English version, because he wants the film to reach as big an audience as possible. It is not therefore perhaps a bad idea that it is television which may give Dreyer a possibility of realising his life's ambition. Although it's also ironic that television should give one of the truly great film directors the chance the film producers never allowed him.

IB MONTY

Tours

THE GRAND PRIX at the 13th Tours Festival of shorts went to B. S. Johnson's *You're Human Like the Rest of Them*, one of a group of recent films made possible through the sponsorship of the BFI's Production Board. A black-humoured fable (with dialogue in decasyllabic metre) about a young professor's vision of human impermanence, it was certainly the most aggressive first film seen at this year's festival.

Two other British entries were particularly well received: Bob Godfrey's animated *Rope Trick* and Peter Graham's *Edith Piaf*, a co-production with France. Graham's documentary begins with scenes of the singer's funeral and moves back into the

life-and-loves department. It includes memorable scattered glimpses of this extraordinary artist's early career—especially a hallucinatory passage unearthed by Graham in a Thirties Pathé newsreel, in which the sobbing dishevelled *môme* is being interrogated after the murder of her impresario.

Peter Fleischmann's hour-long *Autumn of the Gamblers* is a shocker. Ostensibly a logbook on a group of beatniks (Gamblers) passing through Munich, it is an odd case of filmed material getting out of hand and taking a bent of its own: this beatniks' diary modulates before one's eyes into an appalling dossier on 'everyday Fascism'.

Fleischmann's camera tags along with a dozen dropouts who prefer sleeping in the park and seeing the world while still young to enrolment as cogs in the machinery of affluent West German society. After the briefest of glances at what they're dropping out of, one can well understand. Münchners of all classes react violently to this affront to their household gods of *Arbeit und Ordnung*. The young men and women are harassed by the police at every step, provoked, treated as less than human. Street crowds gather and insult them gratuitously. The hissed judgments are invariably shadowed by Nazism: "A pity there aren't any more camps, that's where you belong!" "If Hitler were still here, he'd cut off your long hair and put you to work!"

The honest burghers' xenophobia builds up to this warped logic: the Gamblers mustn't be permitted to leave jobs and country, for they will then have to be replaced by foreign workers who are an even greater cause for alarm. The Gamblers in the film were prevented from travelling abroad. One is in a madhouse; most of the others are now in prison. Fleischmann's self-effacing precision avoids any picturesqueness—the result is one of the few really pure *cinéma vérité* works ever made.

Jacques Tati was on hand to present *Cours du Soir*, a wan satire of pedagogical methods in which he acts, but did not direct. This service has been limply performed by Nicolas Ribowski. The only downright

ESTELLE WINWOOD AND ZERO MOSTEL IN "THE PRODUCERS", COMEDY ABOUT THE THEATRE DIRECTED BY MEL BROOKS, ONE-TIME SCRIPTWRITER FOR ERNEST PINTOFF.



despicable film at Tours, however, was Kosa's *The Suicide* (Hungary): a small boy's despair is here a pretext for an exercise in pompous virtuosity. This academic melodrama won the International Critics' Prize. Borowczyk's *Gavotte* (France), the best film at the festival, won no prize. The brilliant Pole is an established director, it would have been considered unfair to newcomers . . . but even so. The restrained *maestria* evident in *Gavotte's* ten-minute exposé of how frustrating life was for a dwarf in a small corner of Louis XIV's court made all the other films from 22 countries which had been assembled in the Loire valley—long, short, or medium—look childish by comparison.

ELLIOTT STEIN

The Cinémathèque

AT THE TIME of going to press, the great Cinémathèque row still rages in France, with almost every day bringing a new protest, incident, or official statement. Amid the mass of comment in French and English papers, facts however still remain somewhat thin on the ground. What is certain is that Henri Langlois, founder of the Cinémathèque (in 1936), and since then its dictator, animator and soul, is no longer in office. Pierre Barbin, late of the Tours Festival, taking over in circumstances of exceptional difficulty, dismissed the entire staff (their contracts may of course be renewed); and the locks on the Cinémathèque building were changed. According to a report in *The Guardian* by Peter Lennon, this somewhat precipitate action left Mlle. Lotte Eisner, distinguished member of the Cinémathèque staff and occasional contributor to this magazine, temporarily stranded on the premises.

Henri Langlois has been a notable servant to the cinema: omnivorous collector (as has been pointed out, his insistence on collecting *everything* has salvaged much which more rigorous methods might have disregarded), brilliant showman, schoolmaster to the New Wave. In France, protestors against the official action include

film-makers of all generations: Clair, Bresson, Astruc, Resnais, Truffaut, Marker, Godard (who got his face cut in a skirmish with the police). Jeanne Moreau and Marlene Dietrich have been out with the demonstrators; Picasso and Beckett have added their voices. From abroad, directors who have rallied to Langlois' cause make up an extraordinary roster: among them, Chaplin, Bergman, Buñuel, Ford, Welles, Arthur Penn, Dreyer, Rossellini, Visconti, Milos Forman, Reisiz, Losey, Kurosawa, Ichikawa.

The Cinémathèque was Langlois' kingdom, reflecting his autocratic, devious and powerfully enthusiastic temperament. For years, it has been engaged in a painful legal tussle with the International Federation of Film Archives. In France, the authorities (ultimate responsibility rests with André Malraux as Minister of Culture) have been trying to bring this unique organisation, now in receipt of about £200,000 a year in public money, under a greater measure of official control. Correct bureaucratic procedures, it seems undeniable, do not come readily to someone of Henri Langlois' cast of mind. The head-on clash, which has resulted in his disappearance from the Cinémathèque, can only be interpreted as a struggle between two irreconcilable points of view. From this side of the Channel, the facts of the case remain clouded: but, looked at from any angle, the *affaire* Langlois is a tragic episode in the history of a great institution.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

The B.F.I. Award, 1967

THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE AWARD for "the most original and imaginative film introduced by the National Film Theatre during the year" has been made to Masaki Kobayashi for *Rebellion*—the film rejected by the Venice Festival last year but subsequently snapped up by New York and London.

Born in 1916, Kobayashi made his first feature in 1952, but only came to critical attention in this country with the showing

(in 1961) of *No Greater Love* and *Road to Eternity*, the first two parts of his strange, monumental trilogy about the cruelties and disasters of war. *Harakiri* and *Kwaidan* established Kobayashi as one of the foremost directors in a Japanese cinema sadly depleted by the deaths of Mizoguchi and Ozu; and his formal, hieratic style is brought to perfection in *Rebellion* (see review on page 97), where a new note of intimacy and lyrical passion underlying the visual splendours has evoked comparisons with the tragedies of Ibsen and Racine.

Work in Progress

LINDSAY ANDERSON: To direct an original subject by David Sherwin entitled *If . . .*, set in a boarding school. To be shot on location this spring. For Memorial Enterprises.

LUIS BUNUEL: Has completed the script for his next film, in collaboration with Jean-Claude Carrière, provisionally called *La Voie Lactée* (*The Milky Way*).

BRYAN FORBES: Replaces John Huston to direct screen version of Jean Giraudoux's play *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. Cast headed by Katharine Hepburn, Donald Pleasence, Charles Boyer, Simone Signoret, Yul Brynner, Margaret Leighton and Danny Kaye. In colour and Panavision for Warner Brothers-Seven Arts.

JEAN-LUC GODARD: *Le Gai Savoir*, a modernised version of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*. Leading part to be played by Jean-Pierre Léaud.

JACK GOLD: Makes his first feature, *The Bofors Gun*, based on John McGrath's play *Events While Guarding the Bofors Gun*, about the inner conflicts of a British soldier serving in Germany ten years after the war. With David Warner, Ian Holm, Nicol Williamson. An Everglades Production for Universal Pictures.

JAMES IVORY: Bombay start for long-planned production of *The Guru*, with Michael York as a pop idol who goes to India with Rita Tushingham in search of peace and seems unlikely to find it. Utpal Dutt in the title role. A Merchant/Ivory production for 20th Century-Fox.

JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE: Planning screen version of Georges de la Fouchardière's novel *La Chienne*, filmed by Jean Renoir in 1931. To be followed by *Le Cas Packard*, factually based story about American secret agents in Paris.

SAM PECKINPAH: *The Wild Bunch*, a flamboyant Western adventure starring William Holden and Robert Ryan. For Warner Brothers-Seven Arts.

OTTO PREMINGER: *Skidoo*, a comedy about a confrontation between non-conformist youth and the conformist establishment of organised crime. Starring Carol Channing, Jackie Gleason, John Phillip Law. For Paramount.

JOSEPH STRICK: Going ahead with plans to film *Ring of Bright Water* in spite of the fire which wrecked author Gavin Maxwell's Highlands home, impracticable in any case for location shooting. Trained otters to replace Teko and the late lamented Edal. Leading parts to be played by Virginia McKenna and Bill Travers.

FRANCOIS TRUFFAUT: *Baisers Volés*, in which the hero of *Les quatre cents coups* faces military service. With Jean-Pierre Léaud, Delphine Seyrig. Les Films du Carrosse for United Artists.

BOROWCZYK'S "GAVOTTE": A DWARF AT THE COURT OF LOUIS XIV.





Anthony Asquith: 1902-1968

ANTHONY ASQUITH (Puffin) and I were friends for nearly half a century, my wife his friend for more than forty years, but, alas, this does not make it easier to write about him—the words that so easily come to mind are altogether inadequate.

My wife saw Anthony several times during the past weeks and we knew he was going to die. The news of his death left us with no sense of shock—only grief.

Last September we were in Sorrento together for the British Film Week with René Clair, Anthony Havelock-Allan, Deborah Kerr, Trevor Howard, Helen Cherry, Andrew Filson and other friends—a happy party. Anthony must have then been ill but not one of us realised this. I will retain memories of a characteristic act: at a meeting of the British and Italian Writers Guilds, Asquith going to the microphone to urge moral support for the writers in the countries where their freedom was denied.

Over the years we only worked together in a Producer/Director relationship on two occasions: *Lucky Number* in 1932, and again in 1934 when he generously agreed to direct very complicated exterior sequences for the film *Forever England* (C. S. Forester's *Brown on Resolution*). Asquith, of course, directed several films for the Rank Organisation while I was a director of that company and identified with the production programme.

The assessment of his work will come mainly from others. It is worth recalling

that he belonged to the few who had bridged the gap between silent films and sound. In 1928 when Anthony directed his first feature film (after serving his apprenticeship with that other fine character, Bruce Woolfe), I was already a veteran of some six years experience, and clearly I remember the impact made on me by *Shooting Stars* and, later, by *Underground* in 1930. I realised that Anthony was getting his effects by a proper use of visual images, which was remarkable as nothing very exciting up to that time had come from other British directors, except, perhaps, from Hitchcock. How well I also remember the first public performance of *Tell England*; and even if it does not stand the test of time in the more complex attitudes of today, it certainly caught the mood of the moment. But perhaps my sharpest recollection is seeing the rough-cut of *Pygmalion* with C. M. Woolf. It was important for C.M. for this film to be a success as he had taken the decision to sponsor the production despite Wardour Street objections to anything so 'way out' as a film based on any work of G.B.S.

We met at each other's homes from time to time. I knew his mother (who occasionally liked a game of poker with Anthony's friends) and his sister, Elizabeth Bibesco. He was a wonderful son and brother and utterly devoted to his family, as they were to him. His mother used to say: "My son, Anthony, combines in nature and intellect the best qualities of an Asquith and a Tennant." We saw each other at

meetings concerned with the industry but, more frequently, at Sadler's Wells or the Festival Hall to delight in his comments on the work just heard, for he was passionately devoted to music.

Some months ago, after a number of films had been butchered in editing for television length, Anthony Asquith and others wrote a letter to *The Times*. The case was so effectively stated that Lord Hill immediately received a deputation. We agreed to meet at Anthony's home. Before leaving to keep the appointment, he played the piano for us delightfully, I thought, but he apologised for the fact that he had not fully recovered the use of his hand, damaged badly in a recent car accident.

The Times said: "He holds a minor but secure place amongst the world's best film directors." This may be a fair assessment of his work, but for his total life's work he has earned, in particular, the gratitude, respect and affection of thousands—the members of the A.C.T.T., whose interests he cared for more than his own. His other friends and admirers were legion.

Like most of us, Anthony throughout certain periods of his life was subject to emotional stresses and strains. In the last fifteen years or so he appeared to come to terms with himself by the imposition of a self-discipline which was altogether admirable. Puffin was one of the most civilised, decent human beings it has been my privilege to know, and I shall miss him as a friend more than I can say.

MICHAEL BALCON

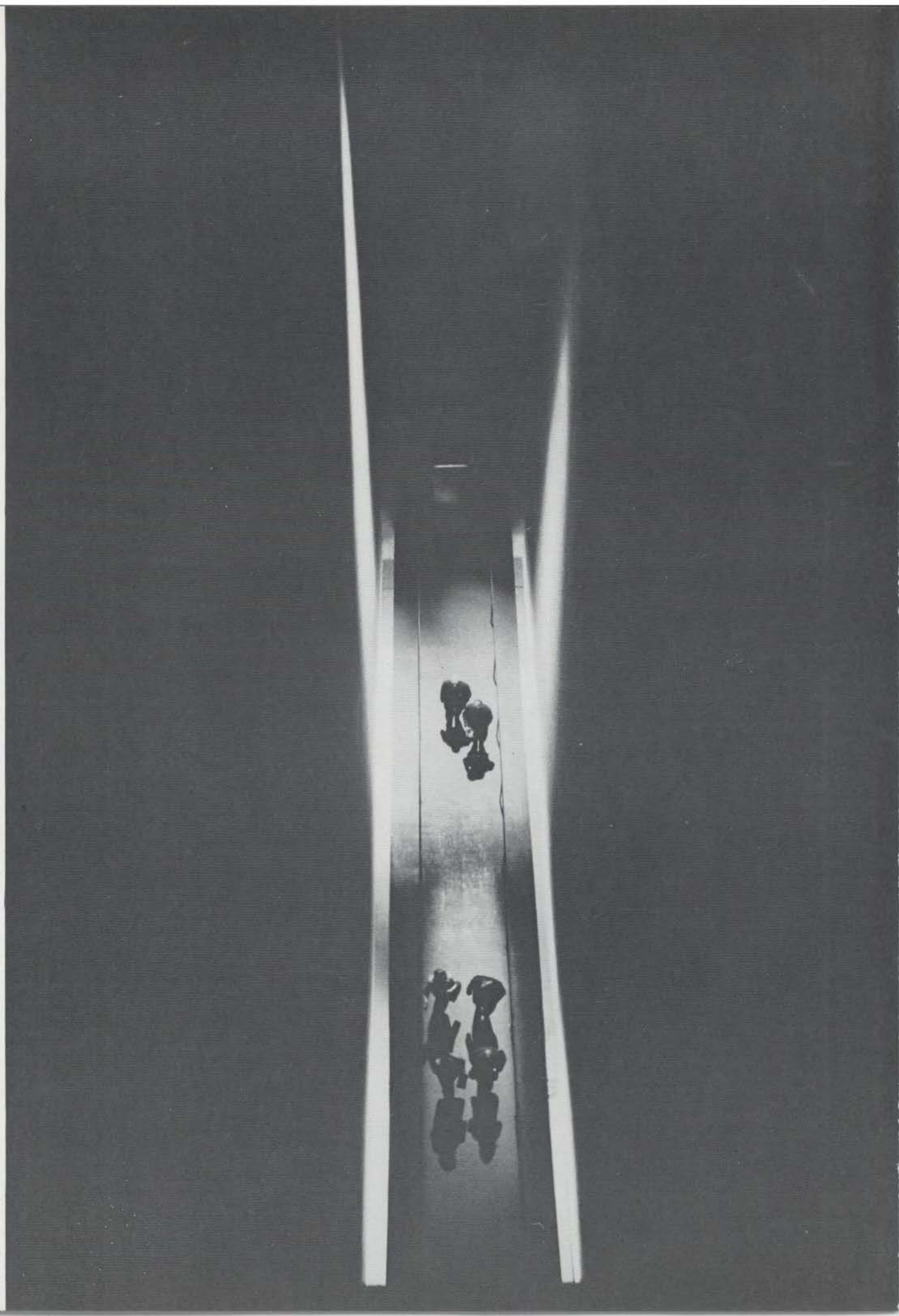
ANOUK AIMEE IN ANDRE DELVAUX'S "UN SOIR, UN TRAIN",





BEYOND THE FRAME

Barry Day



WAR, SAYS A CHARACTER in Dick Lester's *How I Won the War*, 'has brought about some remarkable advances in surgery.' It would seem to require an equivalent upheaval at periodic intervals to advance the technology of film.

Little of the inertia has anything to do with what is technically possible at any given moment. Much of it is an emotional clinging to the financially tried and true, to 'giving the public what it wants'—which is another way of saying 'Don't give them what they haven't asked for in case we can't get the money back.' Money is certainly a dampening influence in the hands of people who treat film as so much cut-to-length merchandise although, paradoxically, never has so much real money been spent on so few films as today. The trouble is, the money is being splashed on conventional production values, on puffing more hot air into familiar coloured balloons. *Camelot* is reputed to have cost 15 million dollars and every frame bears witness to it. Movies may be bigger than ever, but are they any better? More to the point, how often are they any different?

If one believes that at least one acceptable aim of film might be to approximate the experience of human vision and perception, then it becomes retrospectively hard to understand what quite so much of the fuss was about. Certainly it took money and faith to give the movie a voice and the cosmetics of colour, but both of these were reasonable additions to be striving for since we don't happen to live in a mute, monochrome world.

The commercial tug-of-war was perhaps most clearly seen again in the early 1950s: 3-D versus CinemaScope versus Cinerama. All of them were costly in terms of investment and at least two of them were at that stage clumsy. That clumsiness was probably enough to cause the paying public to reject 3-D. It was basically an extension of a fairground novelty and after that novelty wore off, so did the fun of peering myopically through cardboard spectacles.

It's hard to know what to make of Cinerama. With the exception of occasional sequences, it has never seemed to me to justify all the song and dance. To begin with, it wasn't the innovation of the 1950s, as was claimed. Abel Gance was using a tri-screen projection process called 'Polyvision' in *Napoléon* in 1925. That in itself wouldn't matter. What has been rather more worrying is the kind of creative hush that seems to fall upon a director with all that space to fill for all that time. Even the single camera improvement that arrived in 1962 with *How the West Was Won* has only helped this problem marginally. It's still a case of too few ideas chasing too much screen, as clear a case as I have seen of the medium mesmerising the message.

The relatively ready acceptance of CinemaScope, after the initial forebodings, probably owed a lot to its basically familiar nature. It was the same thing only bigger and—in the right hands—better, and it was the starting point for the majority of today's 'wide screen' processes. Such technical changes as have taken place since the early 1950s have been by way of refinements, changes of degree rather than kind. The 70 mm. process, for instance, with its larger negative, provides better definition, and this time there is none of the squeezing required by CinemaScope's anamorphic lens. To date the adoption of 70 mm. has been relatively restricted, not so much by the cost of shooting as by the investment in installing projection equipment in cinemas. It takes a big budget, 'hard ticket' film like a *Sound of Music* or a *Dr. Zhivago* to make that investment sufficiently gilt-edged to be risked.

So we are faced in the commercial cinema today with a storyline which is, by definition, what it has always been. Technical innovation plays second feature to giving the public what it has proved it wants, by predicting the future exclusively in terms of the past. Only the gift-wrapping is changed to protect the infringement of copyright. In only two situations can one detect people who seem to be consciously defying this practice. In one of them the film-makers have plenty of money and deadlines—in the other case they have neither. Paradoxically, these two groups of people operate in the most public and most private areas of film-making today.

If you want to be big, you can hardly get much bigger or more public than a World's Fair. During the 'run' of the Fair you have a captive audience of millions literally waiting to be amused and amazed. In that mood they'll look gratefully at anything that moves, and quite often they have to. The surprising thing is how often this sort of international fair or exposition provides the setting for the kind of innovation and invention that the commercial cinema chooses to ignore. Many of the exhibits may be sideshows that would not survive transplantation to a more critical context. None the less, the fact remains that they often throw up imaginative hints which are studiously ignored by the studios.

* * *

Perhaps the most impressive film exhibit at the 1964/65 New York World Fair was the one in the IBM Pavilion. It was a film called *Think*, the work of Charles and Ray Eames. This was just one of a series of multi-screen films which the Eames had produced up to that time, each suited to a particular environment. In this case they were given an egg-shaped theatre sixty feet off the ground. The audience were placed in a 'people wall' of tiered seats and hydraulically lifted up into the theatre, where they were faced with a battery of seventeen different-sized screens and a live commentator who linked the action.

As we've seen, there was nothing particularly new even then about multiple projection, but in *Think* the Eames brothers gave it point—and the point was perception. If they wanted to make the point about the problems of a hostess contemplating her table seating plan, they used their multiplicity of screens to show just some of the possibilities open to her. They showed time and again in different sequences that an audience can take a lot of different simultaneous impressions and digest them—as long as they are aspects of the same basic thing. Nobody remembers every single image he has been shown, but most people get the point. *Think* made as good a case as had been made up to that point in time for film as 'environment' as an alternative to film as entertainment.

Expo 67, as far as some fifty million visitors were concerned, took the same case and proved it to the hilt. Not only was film used in quantity—someone calculated that to see every one of the audio-visual shows would have taken up the whole six months of the fair's run—it was there in rare quality too. The *Newsweek* critic thought the best films were "light-years ahead of anything being shown anywhere else in the world."

"Instead of telling tedious tales with a single picture on a single screen while the audience sits numbly still, they tell feelings and moods by hurling whole splattersful of pictures on floors, ceilings, whirling globes, plastic cubes and multiple screens in multiple shapes and sizes while the audience moves through mysterious magic chambers. After this, your friendly neighbourhood theatre is a dinky mausoleum for the pointless preservation of decaying movie relics."

It was easy enough to fall under the Expo influence of film as environment; not so easy to want to relate it all to practicalities. Like the Eames-IBM *Think*, some of the films were staggering party pieces tied to a particular architectural setting; though, arguably, no more so than Cinerama. Even so, one wonders how wrong that is in the light of the emotional impact of an exhibit like the National Film Board of Canada's *Labyrinth*.

Labyrinth was a remarkable audio-visual entertainment tailored to an architectural surround, a real use of film as environment. Ignoring the rather pretentious theme of 'the essential story of Man'—apparently a must for every exposition film—the real purpose of the combined 'experiences' which made up *Labyrinth* would seem to have been to clear the mind for the assault and battery of impressions that Expo was about to deliver.

The film blitzkrieg came in two of the three connected theatres. To begin with the audience found itself grouped around a series of tiered balconies, reminiscent of *Riot in Cell Block 11*, watching a short film on two 38×20-foot screens—like Cinerama turned on end. One screen was set into the floor of the building and the other rose at right angles at one end.

From the beginning the viewer's eye was disorientated and from that point it never really had a chance. He was used like the ball in a tennis match as the action switched from screen to screen.

Sometimes the two screens were used simply to extend space, as an acrobat somersaulted right across them both. Sometimes we were presented with cause and effect. A man smiled down from one screen at the new-born child on the screen below; a child threw a piece of bread which was snapped up by a fish on the second screen. We might be shown the identical event from different points of view. As we soared godlike above factory chimneys, we also flitted birdlike between them. The name of the game was disorientation and it was beautifully played. This first part of *Labyrinth* changed the texture of film space and particularly of film time. At different moments it managed to expand space and to condense the time it takes to convey information. It also showed very clearly a basic difference in the grammar of multi-vision as opposed to monovision. Two images juxtaposed in the sequential editing pattern of monovision will almost invariably 'read' as a contrast. Overlapped in multiple projection, the contrast point is still made, but the viewer can also draw secondary conclusions, sense paradox where it exists.

The next 'experience' of *Labyrinth* came in the third and final chamber, an orthodox auditorium with five screens arranged in the shape of a cross. Once again, the theme of the film—man's search throughout the world's cultures for the answer to life—was of less significance than the technical virtuosity involved in the endlessly flowing series of images which grouped and splintered on the five screens. Sometimes the images were all of a kind, then one would change to a different mood and that change proceeded, either slowly or suddenly, to affect the rest. Or else the action of a sequence would begin in isolation on a single screen and spread out from there when it needed dramatic height or breadth to do so—perhaps to show the speed of chase or the beauty of landscape. But invariably the screen would fragment again seconds later, leaving the mind to find its focus.

* * *

It is interesting that the people who were most worried by Expo's mixed-media, multi-screen jamboree were the intellectuals. John Duncan complained to Marshall McLuhan on a BBC-TV interview that since he physically couldn't take in all he was shown at one of these presentations, they must be counted as failures because surely he was *expected* to be able to grasp it all. Not so, McLuhan corrected him gently: "What they are offering you is an environmental image, not a story line... In the environment you automatically miss 99 per cent of all that's there at any one time... our powers of perception don't include environments."

If the message of the mixed-media was environmental stimulation, it undoubtedly came across to its audiences, proving once again that today's audiences—thanks to the amount of sheer 'film' they absorb daily, mainly from television—can take things in their stride which filmgoers a generation ago would have registered as gibberish. The techniques of mixed-media have evolved, according to *Life* Magazine, by being aimed at "the generation raised on TV, conditioned by commercials to accept as commonplace the zoom shot, the jump cut, the freeze-frame. This generation responds to the shock effect of total immersion, multiple-screen, multi-track movies with the same personal involvement that their grandfathers felt in reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*."

This is by no means the same thing as saying that people are *conscious* of the change in their perception. I have yet to hear someone turn to his neighbour and say: "Yes, I quite enjoyed it, but he should have made that last pan slower and cut three frames earlier." Luckily, most of us still survive on our 'film sense', and the rest of Expo certainly gave it a good workout.

Multiple imagery was the order of the day. At the Canadian Pacific—Cominco Pavilion, Francis Thompson and Alexander Hamid took a six-panel screen for their 20-minute film, *We Are Young!*, which tried to express what a frenetic,

complex, confusing, eager thing it is to be young at this moment of time. Their total screen space was seven times that of an orthodox cinema, twice that of Cinerama. Sometimes, as in *Labyrinth*, they bombarded us with all six screens at once, before darkening, say, half the screen area to concentrate on a more reflective image. Most of the time you found yourself consciously looking at one image but *aware* of what was going on in the periphery of the screen. As McLuhan says, you can't *see* it all but you can take it with you. The experience of many Expo films was not purely an immediate one, but a sifting and sorting process that took place hours or even days later.

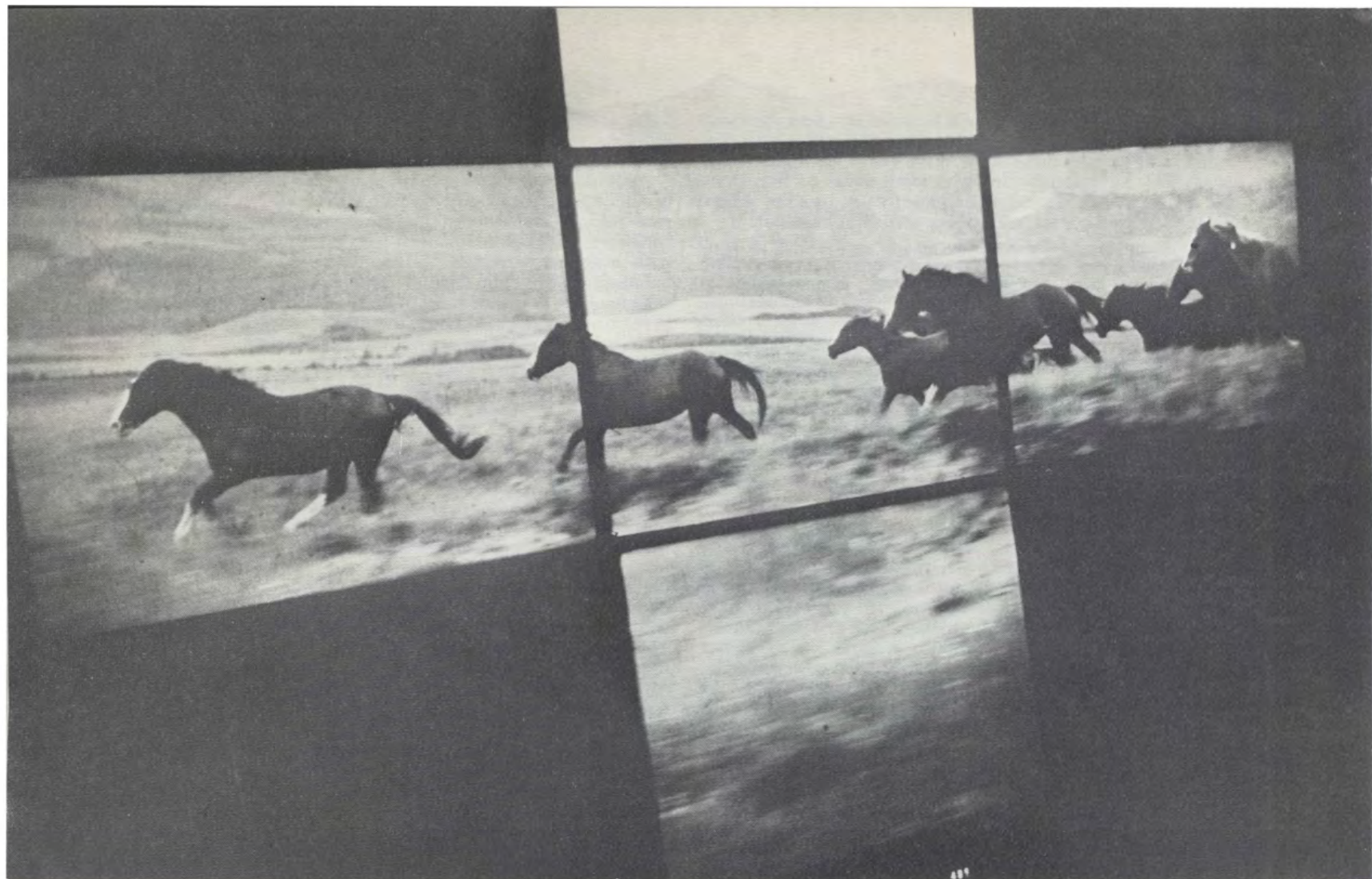
Although multiple screen projection is not new, the technical perfection of matching images was and so, too, was the sensitivity and selectivity in deliberately restricting the area of screen space being used to achieve a particular result. Art Kane showed this in his *A Time to Play*, a 20-minute, 3-screen essay on children's games, sponsored by Polaroid for the U.S. Pavilion. At one moment a single screen isolated the boy who is King of the Castle in lonely splendour. Then the other two screens came to life with hordes of children racing up the hill to challenge him. Another scene that sticks in the mind was the game of shadow tag, in which the camera used the three separate screens to trick the viewer's eye, until it became impossible to tell which were the children and which the shadows. Here, as so often at Expo, you felt you were seeing something which was only possible because of the technical accomplishment of the film process: the visual idea *needed* three screens—it wasn't simply stretched to fit.

To be fair, there were occasions when the trick loomed very large indeed. Disney's Circle-Vision 360° at the Telephone Pavilion was a bigger and brasher version of the Russian Circlorama process that survived briefly in a Piccadilly Circus cinema a few years ago. Claustrophobes were in for a bad time, since the viewer was totally surrounded by nine screens on which film was projected simultaneously. So, for example, when the Mounties rode up to you, they proceeded to ride past you on both sides and by turning round you could watch them ride away too, if you felt so inclined. Ultimately, this kind of film leaves me cold. The mechanics of making it are rather more fascinating than what it contains. Publicity handouts report that much of it was shot from a converted B-25 bomber with a 210° nose turret and that filming involved a nine-camera rig weighing 450 lbs, specially arranged to shoot everything except itself. Unfortunately, the trickery is so intriguing that one finds oneself in sunny shots looking for the camera shadow—and inevitably spotting it.

Another item in the grand fairground tradition was the Czech Pavilion's Kino-Automat. Here was the illusion of the spectator as film-maker and moral judge combined. The actual performance was a combination of a film, *One Man and his World*, and live actors. Periodically the film would stop at a crucial plot point and the audience be asked to vote by pressing a button for what course of action a character should take. The questions were so worded that the decision was a moral one and the spectator placed as a kind of *deus super machina*. According to Raduz Cincera, creator of Kino-Automat: "What we are doing here really is making a sociological and psychological study about group behaviour. It is fantastic. We are learning that people decide not on a moral code, but on what they like to see."

Clearly, many of these Expo exhibits are not directly translatable to the commercial cinema we are used to, although the case may not be as clearcut as some will make it sound. But what about cinema as we are *not* used to it?

Is it not at least possible that what we were really watching at Expo was the opening up of possibilities for what we might call 'applied' cinema and the use of film in fields like education? Is it too fanciful to imagine tomorrow's school or university equipped with a mixed-media auditorium? If we are indeed growing up a 'cooler', more involved generation, what better way to learn about the Battle of Hastings than to *be* there? What better way for business to tackle the complex problem of consumer research than by some form of Kino-Automat?



HORSES GALLOPING ACROSS THE FIVE SCREENS OF "LABYRINTH". PHOTOGRAPH BY ERNST HAAS. © 1967 MAGNUM INC.

But if all this remains projective and speculative, there was one film at Expo which showed what is possible and commercially practical right now. Christopher Chapman's *A Place to Stand*, at the Ontario Pavilion, did not hurl its images across a multitude of screens. Certainly it diffused and repeatedly multiplied reality, but it did it all on a single 70 mm. frame. Which means that this remarkable film could be shown today in any cinema which can project *The Sound of Music*.

What Chapman did that is so remarkable, within the confines of what was, strictly speaking, a travelogue of Ontario, was to let the image dictate the way he used the screen. High tension wires strung themselves out across the 66×30-foot screen; a car crossed the screen diagonally and receded in framed perspective, taking its background with it until it left the whole screen blank. Sometimes he would flood the screen with a panorama, but he was just as capable of devoting the whole space to a detail like a couple of cows splashing in a puddle. At one time I counted sixteen separate, differently framed yet complementary images within the same frame—and one took it all in one's stride. The technical tour de force, which one had to admire as something quite separate from the creative content of his images, was, I am told, achieved by using a computer applied to the process of split-screen printing. The point was always the picture. Movement and framing were never used wilfully, but always as a pointer to what was important to see or feel. Quite literally, poetry in motion.

Pictures, in fact, were the whole point of Expo for many people. Pictures-within-pictures-upon-pictures. Pictures without words and without logical sequence, but pictures which conveyed a lot and made people *feel* without consciously thinking. Expo laid bare a few basic facts about perception. If one picture at its simplest level suggests one specific fact, then two or three seen together, and often in changing relationships to each other, must evoke a complex of

ideas over and above the simple sum of the parts. And since we learn at a level below the conscious, this kaleidoscopic attack of thoughts, sounds and impressions is able to insinuate ideas we might block and question at a rational level. I say this merely as a supposition on the nature of the learning process—nothing to do with any possible propaganda content.

* * *

If one wants to find the experience of Expo irrelevant for present purposes, I suppose the easiest thing to say is that the budgets were prohibitively high to be duplicated minute for minute in terms of commercial cinema. This is probably only partially true; we don't know the budgets of many Expo movies, though *Labyrinth* cost \$4,500,000 including the building. What is true is that Expo films were usually made for the nearest thing we can presently summon up to enlightened patrons: the money was found and there was no need to show a profit on any individual film. This is not true at all of the second group of film-makers, who are conducting parallel experiments in what film can be made to convey.

The American underground cinema has received quite a lot of attention in the last few years, most of it sensational and dismissive, much of it probably well deserved. Like so many modern collective tags, the 'movement' is a haven for talent and tantrum alike. What helps to confuse matters is the general agreement that the point of underground cinema is the 'personal' film, the film which only expresses the subjective viewpoint of the film-maker. In its extreme form it does not even need to communicate anything specific to an audience; it may be a form of individual catharsis. Almost by definition it is the kind of film that no studio or organised body is likely to subsidise.

Thus, cost becomes a creative discipline which can, in the right hands, produce something startling and unique, working with familiar materials like 16 mm. or even 8 mm. film. The

credo of the genuine underground film-maker is best expressed in the remark attributed to Cocteau that film will not become an art until its materials are no more costly than pencil and paper. This situation is rapidly coming about as film stock becomes more flexible and, more importantly, as a few people create their own contexts for it. As Stan Brakhage puts it:

"By deliberately spitting on the lens or wrecking its focal intention, one can achieve the early stages of impressionism. One can make this prima donna heavy in performance of image movement by speeding up the motor, or one can break up movement in a way that approaches a more direct inspiration of contemporary human eye perceptibility of movement, by slowing the motion while recording the image. One may hand-hold the camera and inherit worlds of space. One may over- or under-expose the film. One may use the filters of the world, fog, downpours, unbalanced lights, neons with neurotic color temperatures, glass which was never designed for a camera, or even glass which was, but which can be used against specific daylight film or vice versa. One may become vice versa, the supreme trickster, with hatfuls of all the rabbits listed above breeding madly."

Brakhage himself has gone so far as to grow mould on to film stock and then lacquer it to preserve the patterns and colours. Other film-makers have tried punching patterns of holes in the film or (pace McLaren) designing directly on to the film frame. Tony Conrad in *The Flicker* is said to have composed a film entirely of alternating light and dark frames in 47 various patterns, an experiment extended by Victor Gruen's *Archangel* to the intercutting of solid colour frames.

When it comes to editing, lack of continuity is only the beginning of information—or perhaps more accurately sensation—speed-up. In this context the grammar of the TV commercial has also played an important role in compression, an effect beginning to be seen and widely appreciated in the most patently commercial of commercial films. The almost subliminal flashbacks which build up the background to Lee Marvin's one man manhunt in John Boorman's *Point Blank* is just one recent example that springs to mind. Or what about the to-and-fro time scale Stanley Donen uses to build up the interwoven nature of the marriage state in *Two for the Road*? What I suppose I am saying is that no audience is an island and nor can any film-maker afford to be, though some commercial ones try quite hard. This cross-pollination of technique, with the increased degree of perception it implies, is inevitable and inevitably enjoyable on the part of the audience. So where, one wonders, is the fire?

But to return to the underground. Whatever points north *Point Blank* is edging its way to, the underground film is prepared to go much further, if only to see how far it can go. Gregory Markopoulos, for instance, has been known to introduce groups of images, all of them single frames, in an attempt to echo the musical effect of the repeated leitmotif. Multiple projection is old hat. In George Landow's *Fleming Faloan* (1964) one frame of film contains ten separate scenes going on simultaneously, admittedly most of them fairly similar in content. Andy Warhol has experimented in *The Chelsea Girls* with split-screen projection of two quite separate films, which have an effect, even though they carry story lines, not too dissimilar from Expo's environmental movies.

All this, and much more that sounds bizarre and often is, is what's rumbling through the American underground. Although it may be that few films have emerged which the critics appear to agree are worth considering as films—Jonas Mekas' *The Brig*, Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason*, Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, perhaps something of Warhol—my point is rather one of the ultimate value of their technical probing in opening influential minds that are presently closed. The true importance of the underground is surely that it is facing in the right direction.

* * *

It is sad but salutary, in these days of instant jargon, to note the way a particular tag or description sets up a whole image and surround which effectively prevents people from carrying out a true evaluation for themselves. 'Underground cinema' was firmly placed in the pejorative camp quite early on. So now are 'expanded cinema' and 'mixed-media'. As usual, it is

quite possible to see what led to the categorisation without allowing it to blanket experimentation that may well lead somewhere in time.

As Sheldon Renan says in his excellent study of the underground film: "'Expanded cinema' arrives with its integration into film of many techniques and processes never before considered to be film . . . And with every new kind of film, with every new technique, the underground enlarges the definition of what film can be." This expansion of cinema can take the form at one extreme of running clear film through the projector, or even of running the projector without film in it at all, while an actor mimes in front of the screen as a kind of instant, living film. Conrad's light and dark alternations in *The Flicker* come into this area, as do all the stroboscopic type films which project no image, but simply try to induce a state of mind.

What the makers of these movies are coming to grips with is the concept that film is only one form of cinema and that perhaps it may not be the most important form for too much longer. Television could be well on the way to being a more sensitive means of controlling and manipulating light, and there are other longer term developments we shall touch upon in a moment.

If film as environment has been the big development of the mid-1960s, as has been suggested, then in totally different contexts it has tried to induce totally different states of mind. The critics of Expo's mixed-media experiments were inclined to point to the limited range of emotions that could be conjured up in this way. Certainly the Expo films covered the same generalised ground a number of times. Frequently we were reminded that youth was fun, peace was great and man under the skin was everywhere the same. Whether this is a limitation imposed largely by the context of such an international gathering, whether this is a necessary first scratching of the audience's mental surface, or whether we must always be resigned to dealing in large emotions rather than subtleties is something which must await further experimentation—even if that means Osaka, 1970.

As far as the rest of 'expanded cinema' is concerned, the state of mind they are striving to recreate is almost entirely predictable—the so-called 'psychedelic' experience. Not surprisingly, many of these experiments have left the conventional cinema auditorium far behind—yet another indication, perhaps, that those who have their gold tied up in picture palaces may one day suffer a nasty corrupting attack of moth and dust.

One of the most common forms of mixed-media event is the 'light show', which began in a small way in the 1950s. This frequently took the form of overhead projection of a 'liquid table.' Dyes and coloured liquids were mixed together by hand in a shallow trough to produce flowing coloured patterns which were then projected on to a wall or ceiling, usually as background to a poetry reading or jazz session.

By the mid-1960s light shows, particularly on the West Coast, were big business, playing to large audiences. They would currently seem to have reached their apogee in New York's psychedelic discotheque in Greenwich Village, 'The Electric Circus'. Here, in a converted Polish meeting hall, the dancers are subjected to a battery of effects which add up, in the words of the proprietors, to 'an electronic ultra media environment'. The interior of the hall is draped like a circus tent so that there are no unbroken surfaces and on to the tent is projected an apparently random sequence of movie and slide projections—clips from old movies, slide sequences, coloured water tables—the multi-media lot, synchronised by computer so that the light sources are keyed to the sounds made by the live group below. Then, for good measure, the stroboscopic lighting is turned on so that the dancers appear to jerk past in silent movie style. As an entertainment it is, as the Americans say, 'something else', but essentially that's all it is in its present form, a kind of Fun Palace as Joan Littlewood never dreamed of.

What is interesting and worth considering, however, is the vast new arsenal of technological hardware that is becoming available to the film-maker (in our rapidly expanding sense of that word.)

There is film and there is television and there is a difference. To quote Renan again:

"Television is like film, but it is not film. When a viewer sees a film he is seeing an image made up of light moderated by shadow, and the texture is of thousands and thousands of tiny grains, usually imperceptible. When he watches television he is seeing an image made up of fluorescent light, and the texture is of hundreds of visible horizontal lines. The quality of image is different. The quality of the television image is of immediacy, and never of spectacle (film); of flow, and never of stability (film) . . ."

The difference, dare one say it, is part of the generation gap. Man Ray, one of the early avant garde film-makers, has said that if he were starting again, he would experiment this time not with film but with videotape. The improved quality and greater availability of videotape in the last few years has opened a number of imaginative doors. Technological acceleration is such that it becomes hard to remember that it was only in 1956 that the first Ampex videotape recorder came on to the market. Nowadays, apart from the instant replay advantage, it becomes possible with the more sophisticated equipment to programme optical and editorial effects with a computer. The shape of things still a long way to come, maybe, but the shadow on the wall.

The fact remains that we are growing up a television generation, used to and influenced by the television picture rather than the cinema picture. The videotape recorder could claim its eventual due by its electronic family connections alone, quite apart from the use to which it can be put in creating 'personal' television. A man like Nam June Paik is already experimenting in New York with ways of electronically distorting the transmitted TV picture to obtain aesthetically pleasing patterns—something like the way in which the BBC created the original credit titles for *Doctor Who*. Paik has also used a videotape recorder to pick up shots from different TV stations and make up a kind of taped collage. The possibilities are endless.

Going still further into the realms of apparent science fiction are computer movies, which are so far all pseudo-animated films. Stanley Vanderbeek, in his film *When in the Course Of*, programmed a computer to take a series of words and produce their calligraphic variations. John Whitney

arranged a similar computer hook-up which enabled him to put any word or figure through the same kind of design mutation. What future this kind of film may have and what its application may be is impossible to predict. Right now it looks like a fascinating novelty—but so, a decade ago, did the computer itself.

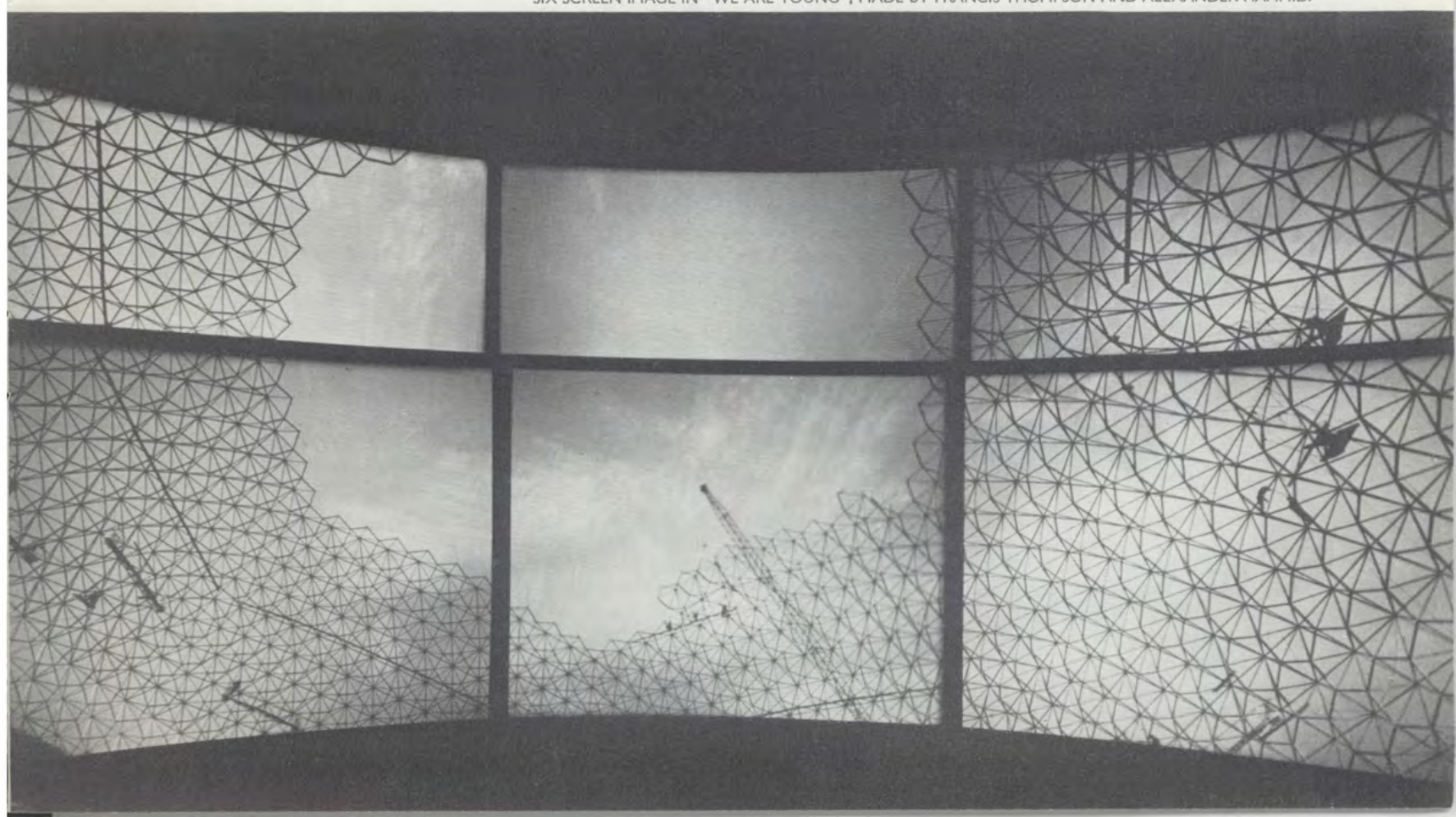
Then again, it may be that laser photography or 'holography' will be the pre-eminent technique of tomorrow's cinema. Two laser beams are used to create one hologram—the equivalent of a 'still' picture. One of the beams shines on to a photographic plate while the second hits the object which is being photographed before bouncing back on to the plate. At the point where the two meet, the 'picture' occurs. I say 'occurs' because it doesn't resemble what we understand by a photograph, even in negative form. It is really more of a pattern. Even the plate shows only a vague transparent image, but when another laser beam is shone through the plate, it projects a clear three-dimensional image. This process has yet, to my knowledge, to be developed for moving pictures, but what do you bet on the day it is that someone will want to remake *House of Wax*?

* * *

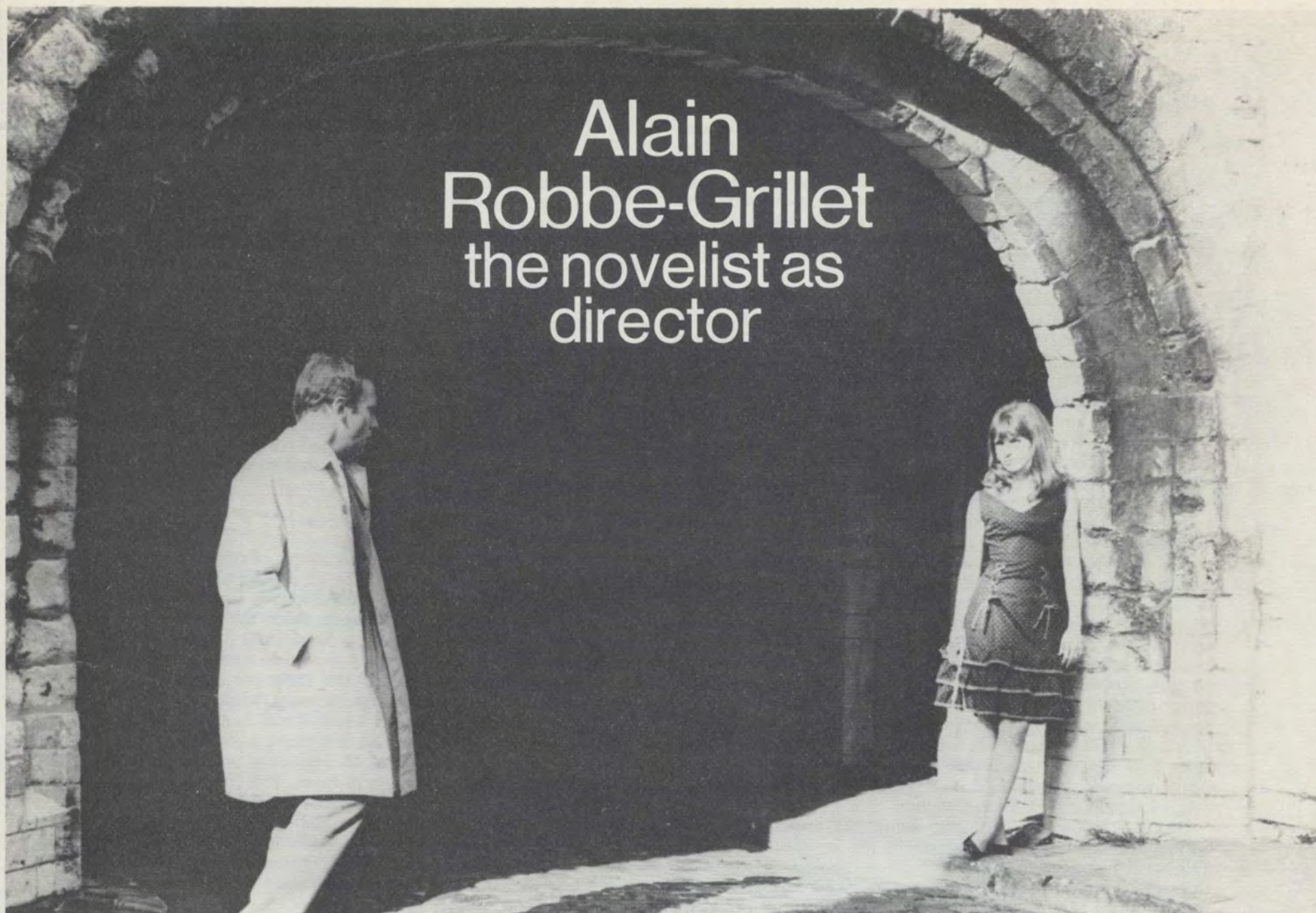
At the time of writing, there are a couple of ripples from the experience of Expo. The new version of *The Skin of Our Teeth* appears to be using wide screen, occasionally broken up into a kaleidoscope of separate actions in much the same way as Christopher Chapman's *A Place to Stand*, and it is rumoured that *The Boston Strangler* is being shot with multiple images. In one typical triple sequence the detective interviews a suspect, the next unsuspecting victim waits, while in the third 'frame' the strangler makes his way towards her.

Ripples are all very well, but they have a habit of dying away unless somebody keeps on throwing stones. If this collection of observations has a purpose, it is to cast a stone, even if it isn't the first. When you consider that at a conservative estimate the sum of human knowledge acquired in the last fifteen years is greater than in the rest of recorded history, the commercial cinema can hardly afford to rest on the laurels of single-screen Cinerama and the estimated \$66 million gross of *The Sound of Music*.

SIX SCREEN IMAGE IN "WE ARE YOUNG", MADE BY FRANCIS THOMPSON AND ALEXANDER HAMMID.



Alain Robbe-Grillet the novelist as director



John Ward

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET HAS A literary style which is not immediately translatable into film terms. This was apparent in his first film, *L'Immortelle*, in which he attempted, with no concessions to the uniqueness of the medium, to apply his *chosiste* principles to a film. The result was ponderous and repetitive, committing every fault that Alain Resnais should make, but somehow never does. Yet, at first sight, Robbe-Grillet seemed to have good reason to believe that the style he had adopted in his novels was well suited to film-making. His concern to prune the novel of interior monologue and psychological analysis, choosing rather to describe the perceptual worlds of his characters in order to find objective correlatives for their emotional states, would seem to remove all those tiresome 'literary' characteristics which film directors have found so difficult to realise. Indeed, it seemed inevitable that he should turn to films, since he had deprived the novel of nearly everything that makes it unique.

In fact, however, his hybrid first film is even less exciting to watch than are his emasculated novels to read. As a novelist, his aim had been to do away with the naturalistic plot by presenting his characters' perceptions organised in terms of their mental chronology. Linear time was dislocated. To compensate for the confusions this would cause, he cast his stories in the mould of a detective or mystery tale. At the heart of his novels there is a puzzle which the reader has to solve; and to solve it he must re-create for himself the linear time which

Robbe-Grillet has taken such care to disrupt.

In the cinema, he apparently sees even less reason to pander to the public because the film image is more immediate. The intense realism of the cinema "draws us towards it out of our lethargy with a violence which we would search for in vain in a corresponding written text, be it a novel or a script." Since what we see on the screen is far more powerful than a few sentences in a book, the author can concentrate even more on the exteriorisation of character through perception. A strange confusion of perceptual detail, a sense of mystery amid disorder, replaces the predictable "linear plot of the old-fashioned cinema" (*Marienbad* script introduction), which Robbe-Grillet insists has become a bore to most readers and viewers. The audience will now become creators in their own right. So we get the disaster of *L'Immortelle*.

This argument is peculiar because from two true premises it draws two false conclusions. The first true premise asserts that the film image is somehow more immediate, more brutal and more violent than literary description or metaphor. This is a simple truth which holds if we do not extend it, but it does not mean that a director can risk being long-winded in other directions. The more a medium allows, the more it demands. While it is easier to rivet an audience's attention, it is also easier to bore them. So Robbe-Grillet is mistaken if he believes that he can use the power of the film image to compensate for his attempts to push his literary experimentation even further.

The pace of the film is swifter than that of the novel. In a

novel one can get away with tension employed purely for the sake of registering minute changes of emotional climate, but a film has to proceed more rapidly. For this reason, Robbe-Grillet is mistaken in thinking that, since the cinema is a visual medium, it is ideally suited to the techniques of his *école du regard*. It is much more dangerous for a film-maker to concentrate on visual repetitions to build up a mosaic of emotional connotations, because a film image, though great in impact, cannot withstand too much scrutiny. For instance, a human face flashed at us several times, without a context to give it force, soon becomes irritating if not exactly tedious (that depends on the face). Partly this is due to the non-selective nature of the camera. If a director is to isolate and vary his presentation of detail, he has two methods open to him. He can adopt the approach used by Robbe-Grillet in *L'Immortelle*: trying to fix detail in close-up, constantly repeating an image to force it into the audience's consciousness, focusing at length on a scene or object and letting the audience make the selections appropriate to its understanding of what the image means to the central character. But to do any of these is to depend solely on the techniques at hand, and the method is fatal because it involves slowing the pace of the film down to that of a novel. Robbe-Grillet would have achieved much the same effect if instead of making a film he had handed out to the audience a book of photographs, with captions giving the dialogue and the amount of time to be spent examining them.

The second way in which a director can present physical detail to evoke his characters' consciousness is by acquiring a film style. Scenes can be repeated, details isolated, the plot temporarily suspended and clock time dislocated, if he can orchestrate the apparent confusion into some kind of rhythmic whole. The fault of *L'Immortelle* was that it was such a static film: there was none of the ebb and flow that would have made us feel the inevitability of the man's destruction. By contrast, Resnais scores, almost choreographs, visual repetition for human voices. Repetition becomes alliterative. In *La Guerre est Finie* the constant shots of Nadine's house become an overture of curiosity, while the flashes of Marianne's face build up a sense of emotional urgency which explodes in the passion of her love affair with Diego. The tensions created by these repetitions prepare us completely for the scenes towards which they draw us; and they deepen our understanding of Diego.

At the time of *L'Immortelle*, Robbe-Grillet had not found himself a film style, and the only gestures he made towards the cinema were a number of borrowings from Resnais, which he failed to shape into an identifiable perceptual whole. Clearly, if the director relies on objective correlatives to develop his character's emotional life, and presents physical detail in a manner that is flaccid, then that character likewise will be flaccid. One can imagine what, left to his own devices, he would at this time have made of *Marienbad*, for even that script was a typical Robbe-Grillet literary piece. A few indications for editing, shot set-ups and camera movements (see introduction to the published text) do not make a ready-made film script. On the contrary, it required a master to make a film of it.

If in *L'Immortelle* Robbe-Grillet was trying to wear a style which he had not the poise to carry off, in *Trans-Europ Express* he has been influenced by the popular fashion (created by Jean-Luc Godard) which, fortunately, is more in keeping with his extrovert artistic personality. Resnais, the intense, subjective psychological analyst, was hardly an appropriate model for a writer whose purpose is to externalise most of what we commonly call human.

The narrative structure of *Trans-Europ Express* immediately

poses the dilemma of style, because it consists of the director himself and two colleagues trying to piece together, from the world around them, a film: the film, in fact, which we are seeing. Or are we? Robbe-Grillet's juggling with levels of reality is trivial in itself, a tired idea at best; what is important is his inclusion of the story-tellers within the story, which again is within another rather more real framework, in order to make certain statements about the artistic process. These statements are by now commonplaces of literature, but in the cinema they are relatively new.

The opening shots establish the frames of reference which are essential to his thesis. The author himself, carrying a suitcase, crosses a railway station, stops at a bookstall to flick through some pin-up photographs, goes through the barrier to the Express and seats himself in a compartment with his colleagues. They begin to compose a film script. The idea comes from the scene we've just watched, but the best they can achieve, at this stage, is a grotesque parody of Robbe-Grillet's stroll across the station. Yet the germ is there: dope-smuggling, suitcases, glamour magazines. So we can get on to the credits, for from now on the film will write itself. The initial act of creation has been done.

Here the external world takes over, and Robbe-Grillet is reduced to the status of an organiser and editor of the physical reality which thrusts itself on to the celluloid. We see Jean-Louis Trintignant cross the station and board the train in almost the same way as Robbe-Grillet. So now we have a central character, and Robbe-Grillet senses the possibilities of the situation. The scene is run through again with elaborations: ideas provided by the surroundings, by the physical appearance of the actor, and the original conception of a dope-smuggling story. The suitcase now has a false bottom and is switched for another containing the tools of the smuggling trade. The innocuous photographs of naked women now become sado-masochistic studies. Locations, objects and situations evoke responses from the character, whom Robbe-Grillet is not always able to control although he does his best to guess what the man will do and say. Moreover, the physical world inspires ideas in Robbe-Grillet's mind which sometimes run away with him.

When the director is asked to name his central character he shrugs his shoulders and rather feebly suggests Elias, the unknown. The point he wishes to make is that art is determined by the author's immediate physical environment to such an extent that the so-called artist is likely to become at best a mere guesser and at worst a puppet*. And once the work of art is brought to life by this pressure, it becomes largely autonomous and resists interpretation and interference. For instance, the camera is constantly treated as an intruder upon reality. Elias frequently glances back at it, irritated that it is poking its lens into his private affairs. And, as often as his central character, the author is swept into dead ends by the pressure of circumstances. (It is pointed out to him that the prostitute cannot steal the suitcase key from Elias' pocket because he gave the key to one of the gang in a previous scene: Robbe-Grillet's reaction is to cut the previous scene.) From the point of view of the artist, creation therefore is an accidental, coincidental, artificial process. Robbe-Grillet several times admits during discussions with his colleagues that he does not know why such and such happened, but that he 'supposes' it was for this reason or that. He even makes mistakes about his

*The idea of dope smuggling was suggested by the railway location in Paris; but in Antwerp, which is Trintignant's destination, diamonds are more likely to be the merchandise of smugglers. Yet so strong is the initial suggestion that Robbe-Grillet cannot quite get the idea of dope out of his head. Even at the end of the film, his woman assistant has to remark on the incongruity of dope smuggling in Antwerp.



own characters. His assistant has to play back the tape to remind him that the girl is not an ordinary 'shop window' prostitute.

What is essentially being rejected here is the principle of Authorial Omniscience, which has been taboo in French literature since Sartre's criticisms of it and has been absent from Robbe-Grillet's own theory of the novel. This part of the film is neatly jigsawed into the rest by placing it within a context of the confusions of appearance and reality (not only the author's understanding, but everyone's), which will be examined later.

* * *

A notable weakness of *L'Immortelle* was the vagueness of its central character, which made it the more difficult to respond to the tensions in his bizarre predicament. If you are that kind of film enthusiast, Turkey itself would be far more vital and mysterious than this insipid man and his jaded femme fatale. His confused obsessions are merely dull repetitions, while those of X in *Marienbad*, for instance, served to build up a complex visual pattern which we could correlate with a definite emotional syndrome. But in *Trans-Europ Express* Robbe-Grillet succeeds in establishing the character of Elias by employing objective correlatives in the manner with which we are familiar from his novels, using physical objects to represent the emotional states and problems of his characters. (The psychological principle behind this is that what we perceive, and how we perceive it, reflects what we feel, think and desire.)

The switch from Robbe-Grillet's casual perusal of a magazine of ordinary pin-ups to the sado-masochistic journal which so fascinates Elias that he steals it, establishes a fundamental change of character: from the normal to the perverted. Also consider why Elias leaves the railway carriage with the magazine in his pocket, thus enabling the young woman to search his suitcase. Robbe-Grillet suggests that he might have gone to the toilet. Exactly! And later, when he acquires the gang's suitcase, there is a rope in it. Why? Later still, he buys a rope and some chains, which again reminds us of the photographs. Then gradually we learn of his tendency to rape, of his lack of interest in willing prostitutes or chambermaids; and we realise that apart from their functional importance these ropes and chains stand for his manacled and twisted sexuality and, by extension, the limited nature of all his emotional life.

We can deduce from this his taste for sexual fantasy and aggression, which before long we witness. His sexuality is largely self-centred, and we find this affirmed in the suspicious, isolated life he leads, outside the law and finding his acquaintances among prostitutes and criminals. The career he has chosen for himself is one of the few to which he is suited: the isolated, illegal life of the smuggler, narrow in his range of contacts, continually moving, insecure and suspicious of everyone. All the characteristics of his sexuality are echoed in his career as a smuggler.

Robbe-Grillet unifies these characteristics in terms of a further set of objective correlatives (in addition, that is, to the photographs, the chains and ropes, and the suitcase which represents a whole way of life). These should not be confused with symbols. Objective correlatives can evoke certain emotional states solely because they and these states are, to quote Hume, 'constantly conjoined'. Unlike symbolism, there are no structural affinities involved.

The first great objective correlative is the train itself. Constantly moving, repeating the same journey, with the same destinations and without deviating from its direct route, it precisely parallels Elias' travels as smuggler and sexual deviant. The second and related set of correlatives are the

railway lines, the cracks between paving stones and the lines of metal studs in the road. On several occasions we see Elias walking between railway lines or balancing on cracks in the pavement. These correspond to the precariousness of his state and of an emotional life so delicately balanced that in a moment of extreme stress it topples over into murder. And as a smuggler, he walks between two possible catastrophes, the line of gang vengeance and the line of legal punishment. He is in a no man's land, pressured on all sides to topple off his emotional tightrope.

When he is at the point of sexual excitement, having chained the prostitute prior to 'raping' her, shots of the train and the railway lines are cut in to the scenes to correlate with the narrowness of his sexual feelings and the transitoriness of his satisfaction. Even when he makes contact with a prostitute who is prepared to take part in his fantasies, he soon becomes bored: the more he 'rapes' her, the more difficult it becomes for him to believe in the reality of her performance and, *a fortiori*, the reality of the rape itself.

Not only Elias' character is established in this way. When we see the James Bond and Red Indian posters and the photographs of dark, languorous women on the wall of the boy's room, we immediately conclude that the boy has romantic ideas about crooks, spies and seductive women. He is ready for intrigue. And sure enough his watchful eye sees that the blind man is not blind, and his suspicious mind jumps to the conclusion of crime. So we can understand why he hides Elias and stubbornly refuses to reveal his whereabouts to the gang. Nothing is said, but we know that he is a lonely, conspiratorial, somewhat sexually frustrated adolescent.

* * *

Having noted the similarities between the techniques of the film and Robbe-Grillet's novels, we can return to the new influence which I mentioned earlier, and which perhaps partly explains why *Trans-Europ Express* is a better film than *L'Immortelle*. Unlike Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard has even more imitators than films to his credit; at the latest count anyway. And generally this has not been a bad thing: in Robbe-Grillet's case, at least, it has been wholly salutary.

There are several reasons why Godard was just the influence Robbe-Grillet needed. While Resnais' influence would be likely to make him still more literary, Godard's free-flowing, associative, impressionistic burst of visual ideas is just the style (and form) which Robbe-Grillet, arch-perceiver of modern novelists, would be likely to find both invigorating and releasing. Godard's influence would enable him to loosen up his film style and cushion his tendencies towards didacticism. Furthermore Godard, like Robbe-Grillet himself, often casts his films in the mould of a crime story. Also like Robbe-Grillet, he is willing to admit that his characters and even his actors might know more about themselves and his films than he does. He is an actors' director, which Resnais most definitely is not, and judging by the example of *L'Immortelle* Robbe-Grillet badly needed some help in that direction. Most of all, perhaps, Godard has so perfected the skill of removing the author-director from the film, or reducing him to just another character, that there is nothing to intrude between film and audience. The film begins to live its life and develop autonomously. Godard deliberately uses Brechtian techniques to achieve these effects; effects which have long been part of Robbe-Grillet's artistic purpose.

Godard and the Robbe-Grillet of *Trans-Europ Express* also share their interest in the nature of the relationship between appearance and reality. At the end of the film there is a scene which is reminiscent of Godard's attempt, particularly in *Bande à Part*, to balance, confuse and portray the interactions between art and reality. Robbe-Grillet and his colleagues read

"TRANS-EUROP EXPRESS": TRINTIGNANT IN ANTWERP DOCKLAND AND WITH THE GIRL (MARIE-FRANCE PISIER).

in a newspaper that Trintignant/Elias has been killed in exactly the way they had decided. Discouraged, they conclude that their story was too real for anyone to believe, and so resolve to scrap it. Presumably this means the Elias story was true: he was killed, it is in the newspapers. But the last shot we see is of Elias close on the heels of the writers, embracing the 'dead' prostitute. Illusion? Reality? Who knows? Who cares? The only solid realities are the train, the bookstall, the station, and so on. Once human beings begin spinning yarns about them, all criteria of truth vanish. So we are left with an affirmation of Robbe-Grillet's old theme: the unique reality of the physical, perceived world.

Underpinning this is a more general thesis about the vagueness of all distinctions between appearance and reality. Examples of the deceptive nature of the world proliferate. Suitcases with false bottoms, containing sugar when we expected dope; jokes about incongruous barmen being members of the Vice Squad; blind men who aren't blind; endless meetings ('Dans le Labyrinthe') which seem like a game but are very serious; a group of gunmen in dark glasses about to kill Elias, but turning out to be his friends; a make-believe rape which might at any time turn into the real thing; a book hollowed out to contain a gun; a joke to a salesgirl that he wants a suitcase for smuggling, which is not really a joke . . . All this is pure Godard. And the police who, in their efforts to keep up with the manoeuvres of the smugglers, become as sinister as the crooks themselves—while the smugglers, on occasion, masquerade as policemen to test Elias' reactions. Finally, in a scene surprisingly underplayed by Robbe-Grillet, the prostitute, imagining she is once again performing in a fantasy for Elias, allows herself to be tied up and suddenly realises that this time he is serious. His instincts will have full play, his pleasure will be refined. The game has become reality. And it is this very shifting quality of appearance and reality which is used to trap Elias himself. He goes to Eva's nightclub to indulge sadistic fantasies, and finds himself caught in a masochistic reality which ends with his death.

A further reason why this film works is that Robbe-Grillet handles the detective story formula (an element in all his fiction: who did—is doing, will do—what, when, where

and to whom) much more lightly than he did in *L'Immortelle*. He is not too serious (cf. the 'where' joke, the absurdity of the scarf routine, the reference to Trintignant by name) and is prepared to sacrifice the audience's suspension of disbelief to the demands of entertainment. *Trans-Europ Express* is a much less naturalistic film than *L'Immortelle*. Perhaps this is the real reason why it is more successful: it is less ambitious, and as didactic comedy it benefits from the fact that the terms of comedy are critical anyway. When we laugh, we laugh at something. In other words, we have already made a critical point against it.

* * *

Although Robbe-Grillet seems to be on the right track, he is still groping towards a film style. *Trans-Europ Express* is still experimental, and more than simply in the sense that it is a film about how to make a film. Certain criticisms, however, should be made. Unimportant in themselves (many of the weaknesses could have been erased by a little ruthless editing), they do explain the feeling I have that Robbe-Grillet is still not entirely adjusted to the cinema.

The pace of *Trans-Europ Express* is, at times, rather slow. For example, the intricacy of the gang's arrangements and various tests of Elias could have been pruned and left more to the audience's imagination: Robbe-Grillet has not explored the extent to which the artist can suggest details without showing them in laborious scrutiny. (Contrast the way Resnais in *La Guerre est Finie* evokes the whole complex of a revolutionary's life through a few details of Diego's behaviour, or the way Godard succinctly paraphrases Hitchcock in *Une Femme Mariée* to suggest the absurd intrigues which are attached to adultery.)

Again in *Trans-Europ Express* the scenes with the boy, who is little more than a plot device, are far too long. If they are intended to show what Elias might have been like as a teenager, or to suggest that the youth is well on the way to becoming another Elias, then the point in terms of the picture as a whole is gratuitous. This is just not what the rest of the film is about, and the link is so tenuous that to be of any significance it requires a great deal more arguing than Robbe-Grillet gives it. At worst these scenes are dull, at best dilettantish.

It is unnecessary to see Elias enter every building he goes to, climb the stairs and go into a room, and reverse the procedure in the same detail when he leaves. In his introduction to the *Marienbad* script, Robbe-Grillet makes the point that the mental time of the cinema is faster than chronological time; yet in *Trans-Europ Express* he too often lags behind the speed of his audience's mind.

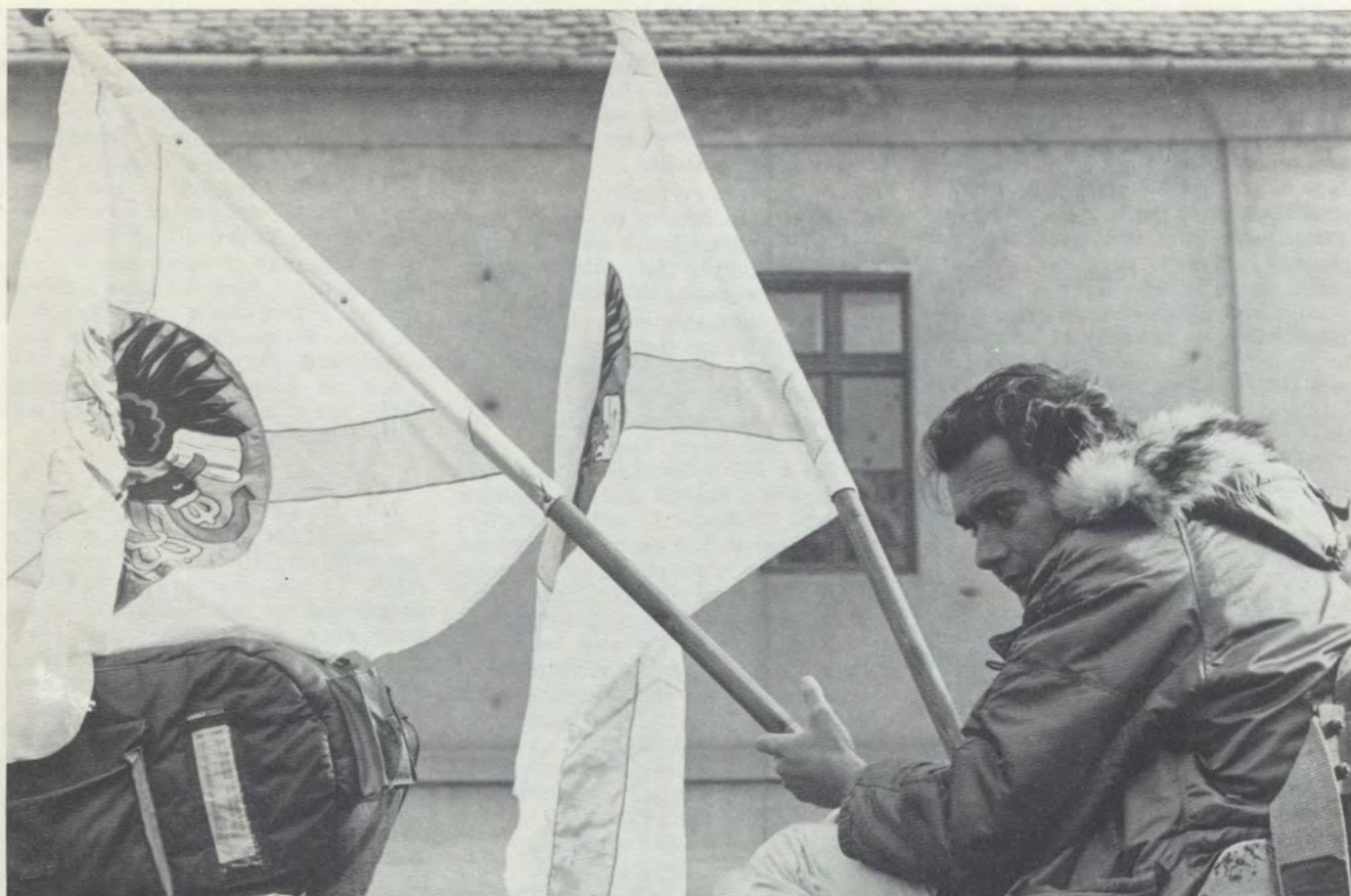
The only time that he betrays his own principles is in the brief interior monologue towards the end. Elias is returning to France after realising that the police are following him. He rests back his head, closes his eyes, and after 'a few blurry seconds' we see him imagining that he is shooting it out with the police and trying to hurl himself from the moving train. Apart from the fact that this is a tired piece of fantasy, it is made irrelevant by Robbe-Grillet's remark a few minutes before that Elias felt like leaping from the train because he saw policemen everywhere. Surely this bit of imagining could have been left to the audience. (As for the way Lorenz, the policeman who hovers about looking sinister, harasses Elias, we might have been shown how Elias really did see policemen everywhere, instead of just *one* policeman everywhere.)

But these and similar criticisms apart, *Trans-Europ Express* indicates that Robbe-Grillet has begun successfully to make the transition from a literary to a film style without making any concessions to theories of art which he has previously opposed.

THE LAST SCENE OF "TRANS-EUROP EXPRESS": ROBBE-GRILLET (LEFT) TAKES LEAVE OF HIS CHARACTERS.



FRANKENHEIMER ON LOCATION FOR "THE FIXER".



FRANKENHEIMER

A HALLUCINATORY JOURNEY, through a series of townscapes that seem as vividly familiar as celluloid dreams. Down these interminable boulevards, flanked with biscuit or puce or pale salmon buildings, glittering with advertising signs, more than forty years of movie chases have taken place. Phyllis Dietrichson died sobbing in Walter Neff's arms in that imitation-Spanish villa, "Tangerine" floating from a Forties radio down the street; Tidewater Oil's looming blank façade towers on the spot where Norma Desmond lived in crumbling Gothic with her butler, her gigolo, and her memories. Now we are in *Mildred Pierce* territory, as sad suburban streets with their shabby palms give way to a sparkle of seedy restaurants set against the huge, seal-grey Pacific. To our right, as a guide might say, the Slide Area: sand-dunes 200 feet high like gigantic camel-humps, with 100,000 dollar spit-and-stucco bungalows perched on the edge. Along the crests of the collapsing hills, palms stand like sentries, guarding nothing.

None of this has anything to do with reality. So one feels no twinge of sur-

prise, passing through the Italianate gateway of John Frankenheimer's house, noting the huge Norma Desmond-like car squatting in the garage, in realising that one is in the *Seconds* hideaway that Rock Hudson found at Malibu. The front door opens, and there it all is: the kidney-shaped swimming pool fronting the ocean, massive armchairs, tables loaded with books, and a studio that could be Antiochus Wilson's, and was added by Paramount in return for the use of the house.

Startlingly, Frankenheimer offers a Bloody Mary at eleven o'clock in the morning—refused with what one hopes is an imperceptible shudder. He sits nervously at a circular table, a tall, handsome, large-boned man who despite his physical size gives an impression of high-strung delicacy. His tension is constant. The California uniform of casual clothes—T-shirt, slacks, slippers—as usual there has nothing whatever to do with relaxation.

One is aware, constantly, of Frankenheimer's determination—in an increasingly impersonal Hollywood—to hold out for a personal statement, for a

humanitarian ideal. He has sympathetically understood the agonies of growing up (*The Young Savages*, *All Fall Down*), the dangers of extremism in politics (*The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seven Days in May*), the necessity for personal honesty and an avoidance of escapism (*Seconds*). *Grand Prix*, despite many splendours, suggested a regression into the pure entertainment picture, the impersonal blockbuster, though even this film conveyed powerfully a mystique: motor-racing. One hopes that *The Fixer* will take Frankenheimer forward again, allow him to make the kind of strongly individual statement for which one has honoured him in the past.

He began by talking about his schooling—a Catholic Military Academy, Williams College in Massachusetts—and his early interest in midget races. After driving midget cars competitively at college, he switched to acting, finally entering movie-making by a fluke: working in the Mail Room at the Pentagon during his Air Force service, he heard that a motion picture squadron

was being formed at Burbank. When he arrived there, he found that the squadron's C.O. was a former head grip at Warners, and that none of the others had been near a Hollywood studio.

"My first job was taking this group of derelict Air Force men out to shoot *How to Make Asphalt* at a local plant. I ended up letting the whole crew go and doing it solo. And then I made a picture on Hereford cattle. And through that I met a guy who was doing a television show in which he'd plug his own cows—you'd hire one, and it would be fertilized by his bulls, and you'd return the cow, and sell its offspring. The guy used to bring his cows on to the set, and he'd get me to write scripts around them, and they'd defecate all over the place, and the director had only two cameras: there was a choice of cutting to the producer or the cow, and it was hard to tell the difference.

"Finally I started to direct: that was hell. Later, I shot stuff on Air Force stock—they didn't care what I did—on the freeway, in the desert. I'd stand out there on the roads at rush hour and photograph the horrible congestions, and the accidents, and over them I'd have a sweet, dulcet voice reading the California Chamber of Commerce's spiel about how great the freeway system is. Then I went back to New York. And when I left the Air Force, after bumming around and working as a waiter and other things, a guy at CBS took a chance on me and hired me as Sidney Lumet's assistant on a historical programme called *You Were There*. In my spare time I'd pore through books of paintings, trying to work out a visual style that would stand me in good stead later on. And looking at pictures, seeing which directors meant most to me."

Where did you discover the most useful sources of a visual approach?

Gauguin taught me most of what I know about perspective. He in turn was influenced by Japanese painters, and I learned a great deal from them as well. And from the Japanese directors who again have learned from those painters: you look at Kurosawa's films, at the long lenses he uses, and you can glean more from him than from anybody, and he is perhaps the deepest of all influences on my work. And the photographers, Robert Frank, Ernst Haas, Eisenstadt, Bischoff: they taught me a great deal, above all that every rule is made to be broken. You read Eisenstein's books and they're fine, but what you don't read is that you can break the rules, if you want to.

Hitchcock, of course... any American director who says he isn't influenced by him is clear out of his mind. René Clément. And Welles... You know he made, from the photographic point of view, just about the perfect film in *Kane*. The problem is that you really don't care about anybody in it. And I suppose that violates the whole concept of drama,

which is that you have to have somebody you really care about. Welles's was a clinical approach to the whole thing, just a bisection of it. And that's why you can look at the film again and again, because it's just what he wanted it to be: a technical exercise...

Then you went on to direct remotes for Ed Murrow on *Person to Person*, and work on *Danger*, *Climax* and *Playhouse 90* before coming into film features. What was that period like in television?

Danger—appropriately titled—was the show CBS on occasion put directors in whom they were thinking of canning: if they failed on that, they were out. I was put on the show to try to help these bums. One night I was wearing a 150-dollar suit to date a girl and the video flashed and the director screamed "Take two!" and camera two was pointed at the control booth, and there was the booth on the screen, coast to coast. So I yelled, "No. Take one!" and the technical director did that, and the director stood up and screamed, "Take anything! Save me! Save me!" And proceeded to vomit all over me. *On the air!* Luckily the production assistant man was an ex-prizefighter, and he decked the director with one blow to the jaw, and then I directed the show. That was how I got to be a director.

The pressures were terrific in live television. On *Playhouse 90*, we'd rehearse two and a half weeks, then go for three or four days on camera. But in the *Playhouse* I learned how to develop characters with a writer, how to improvise. I had colleagues like Ralph Nelson, Franklin Schaffner, Sidney Lumet, Delbert Mann, Arthur Penn, Rod Serling. We all came up together through the *Playhouse*.

Your first feature film, *The Young Stranger*, was originally a *Climax* show, wasn't it?

Yes. It was originally called *Deal a Blow*, and it was written by Robert Dozier, son of the producer Bill Dozier, about his life with his father when he was a small boy. When Bill Dozier became head of RKO he decided to make the picture, and his son wrote the screenplay. Everything went wrong. The production department tried to intimidate me on my first picture by saying "You've only got 25 days." The producer wanted to be a director, and we argued constantly. I had a cameraman who had been under contract to Metro for 25 years, and everything I wanted to do he'd say couldn't be done. When I'd say, "Look, I want this shot, I want the depth of focus across the boy to the man coming in the door," he'd say it couldn't be managed. Then they would take half a day to light the scene.

The crew was a typical American crew, just awful, they'd give me open hostility over new ideas. At a quarter to six you'd suddenly hear a concerted "Fight night tonight!" in the middle of the scene and everyone would stop and talk about the fight. I was so tense I

would drink a bottle of Ampergal a day, and my stomach was a wreck, trying to finish this thing in 25 days. Out of that came what people have referred to as my temperament. I swore I was never going to put myself through anything like that again as long as I lived. I was going to have a film done my way or not at all. Of course, it's different now: if anyone doesn't do what I like, he is out, fired. I don't care if it's the lead actor: I have to have complete control. I didn't have complete control on *The Young Stranger*. And it's a constipated effort, a lousy movie. And RKO cut it anyway, and I thought "Who has to take that crap?" So I went back to television until 1960.

Who brought you back to Hollywood?

Selznick. He helped me by giving me the script and direction of *Tender is the Night* to do, but unfortunately he abandoned the idea. He taught me all I know about film-making today. Then I got a real break: Harold Hecht asked me to do *The Young Savages*, from a novel by Evan Hunter. The script was bad, but I saw something in it: I had lived in New York, and I knew the locations. I had lived only five blocks from the movie's setting. Luckily, Hecht let me get a new script written by J. P. Miller, who had done *The Days of Wine and Roses* with me on television. I didn't want Dina Merrill, but Hecht wanted to put a rock'n'roll singer in as one of the boys, and I said no, the hell with that, and to get rid of the singer I agreed to have her: we traded. Selznick and I cut the picture together, and it came out well.

And *Bird Man of Alcatraz*?

I was originally going to do it for *Playhouse 90*. But the Prisons Bureau came to CBS and said, "If you do this, you will never get co-operation again from us, for anything." And having done the picture I'm glad I didn't attempt to do it on live TV. With the problem of getting those birds to act, it would have been one of the greatest disasters of all time. At first they wouldn't let me direct it: I'd fought with Burt Lancaster on *Savages*, and so Charles Crichton started work on *Bird Man*. After three weeks Hecht called me to California and told me he was unhappy.

I looked at the stuff they had shot and didn't like it. They weren't using a real gaol, and I asked why. They said the prison authorities wouldn't co-operate, so I said, "That's a lot of crap. We could find an abandoned one." But I didn't win that battle, and we used a set. The script was so long-winded it took one hour ten minutes for the first bird to show up. We had to close the picture down at one stage for cuts and re-writes and re-shooting preparations, and it was a terribly difficult picture to make. There's no such thing as a trained bird. Once you got lights and camera and crew, a bird would be petrified, and we'd have to sit there until the bird felt like



"SEVEN DAYS IN MAY": KIRK DOUGLAS.

acting. It was torture, it really was. And it was like being in prison because we had a netting, a wire mesh construction over the set, so the birds couldn't fly out. We were trapped, it was claustrophobic, and it took forever to make.

All Fall Down seemed very close to you . . .

I had read James Leo Herlihy's novel long before and liked it, and I'd always wanted to work with William Inge; this seemed to be an ideal subject for him to adapt. John Houseman gave me the choice of three subjects he had signed to do at Metro, and luckily I chose this one. I loved making the movie. I would have preferred to make it on location in the Middle West, though, instead of using that studio street. But Angela Lansbury and the rest of us went around picking up bits of furniture to make sure the house looked authentic, lived in.

Some people felt that love scene with the lake and the swans was too arty . . .

It was meant to be a parody of idyllic love as Clinton, the boy, would see it. I wanted the whole picture told from his point of view, as the novel is. It's the story of someone losing his innocence and that should have been shown through the images, more or less subjectively. And another thing was wrong: Warren Beatty was very good, but he wasn't quite up to the last scene, when he is left behind by his younger brother, and you see that he knows he's no longer the hero Clinton thought him to be.

And then came your association with George Axelrod, on *The Manchurian Candidate* . . .

George and I had wanted to work together for years, and we bought the property together. We had been working on *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which I was to direct, but Audrey Hepburn didn't want me, she hadn't heard of me, so I was replaced early on. The problem with *Candidate* was that it had no third act, if you wanted to observe the codes. In the book, Marco orders the execution of the mother and father. Now we couldn't have a film that advocated killing people.

We couldn't get around it, until at last we hit on the idea that he doesn't know what Raymond is going to do, that Raymond is going to shoot them down.

It was hysterical what happened at the preview. It was held in San Francisco, and the audience reaction was fantastic. In the foyer a man came up to me and said, "The Goddamned Commies are never going to let you release this picture. I'll tell you that now. This really shows 'em up as they are." I walked around the other side of the table and a guy said, "Those right-wing bastards are never going to let you release this picture." So I brought the two guys together and introduced them. The last thing I saw they were having a heated argument in the lobby. At one stage we were going to be picketed by the American Legion and the Communist Party. We tried to encourage them both, of course. After all, the whole point of the film was the absurdity of any type of extremism, left or right.



"SECONDS": ROCK HUDSON.

How did you come to direct *Seven Days in May*?

After *The Manchurian Candidate* I fired my agent because he suggested I make the Edith Piaf story with Natalie Wood. That would have been the death of me. I was doing a television show for the American Civil Liberties Union, in which I was active, and the producer of the show, Eddie Lewis, rang me and said he had read the galleys of *Seven Days*.

I loved the anti-MacArthur, anti-McCarthy theme. It was at a time when the military were very strong in this country (and God knows they're strong now, too). But this was just after Kennedy got in, after eight years of Eisenhower, which was pretty tough to take; those were the days of General Walker and so on. I think that even though we are involved in this ridiculous thing in Vietnam the temper of the country has swung the other way, but then things were bad. Kennedy wanted the picture made very much . . . Pierre

Salinger conveyed that to us. He said that when we wanted to shoot at the White House he would move for us, to Hyannis Port that weekend.

Was the studio worried about the subject matter?

They sure were! They were worried clean out of their minds! But there was nothing they could do about it because we came in with such a strong package, and paid for it with our own money. I had to borrow from the bank myself. And we had Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Rod Serling, Edward Lewis and the number one best-seller in the country. There was nothing they could do. We had total control.

Douglas felt he was playing a secondary role to Lancaster, which indeed he was. He wanted to be Burt Lancaster. We had endless arguments, rows, and finally it came to sitting down with Douglas and saying, "Look, you don't like it, but stop playing the part like a Western hero. Jiggs Casey, no matter how you look at it, is a despicable human being: he rats on his friend."

The theme of *Seconds* evidently fascinated you . . .

It did: the old American myth that you have to be young, that financial security means happiness, you could go on for half an hour about what *Seconds* really means. You are what you are, and you live with yourself, and that's what life's about. This man couldn't face up to himself—people go to psychiatrists for the same reason—and he ended up with an appalling situation on his hands. I thought the film had an important and powerful statement to make.

Casting was a terrible problem. The film demanded extreme close-ups, and how could any actor play both the roles? He would have to be great enough to get over that scene of the

(Continued on page 103)

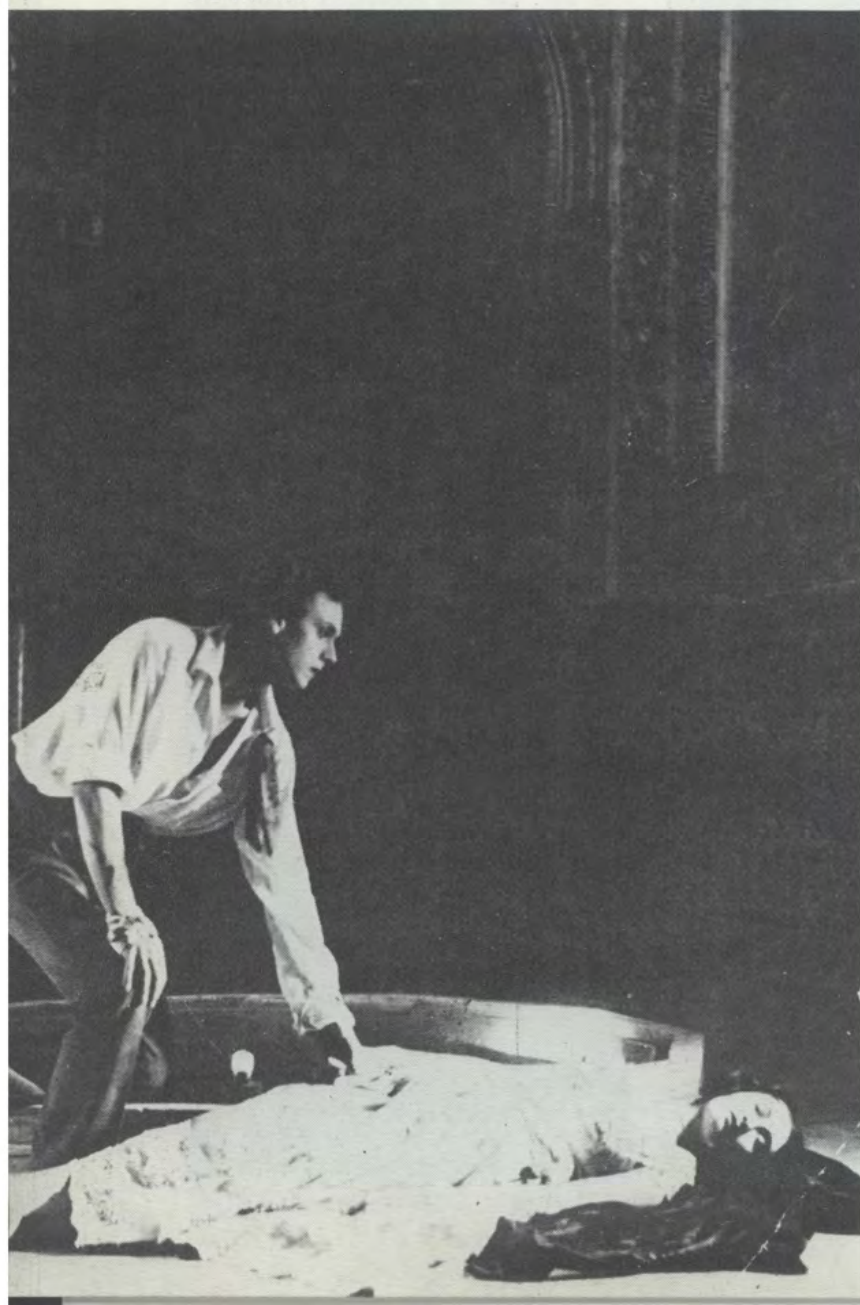
"THE EXTRAORDINARY SEAMAN": MICKEY ROONEY.



Richard
Roud

ANDRÉ BAZIN: his fall and rise

MARCEL L'HERBIER'S "ELDORADO" (1922): JAQUE CATELAIN AND
EVE FRANCIS.



IT HAS TAKEN ALMOST ten years for just a selection of the all-important essays of André Bazin to be translated into English, and it is to the credit of the University of California Press (and to the shame of English publishing houses) that even these ten essays have now been Englished.* But have they? Leafing through the (beautifully produced) California book, it seemed to me that something had gone wrong; Bazin didn't sound as good as I had remembered him. He was not the greatest of writers, but he wrote clearly and forthrightly. I was inclined to put this slight disappointment down to the inevitable loss in translation or to my perhaps too golden memories of the original. And then I began to notice strange things.

Hugh Gray (the translator), or the editor of the book, or the proof-readers, or somebody, seems to have had great difficulty in simply *copying* words, proper nouns, from the French text. Raymond Queneau's *Loin de Reuil* comes out *Loin de Reuil*; the French director Berthomieu appears as Berthemieu; the novelist Vercors has lost his final 's', and by some strange phenomenon of compensation, this has been given to Jean Vilar, making him Jean Vilars. Nathalie Nattier is spelled Natier; the Belgian director d'Haesaerts appears as d'Haershters; the Concours Lépine, although correctly spelled on page 17, becomes incorrectly L'Epine on page 173. Molière never wrote a play called *Le Médecin malgré lui*; I doubt very much whether Christian Bérard ever illustrated the poems of anyone called Rimbeau (I even wonder if he did Rimbaud, for that matter). Valéry's famous quip about the realistic novel always being obliged to record that the Marquise took tea at five o'clock has suffered some kind of sex-change: it is now the Marquis who has tea, not his wife.

Minor matters, these, perhaps, but disturbing. Worse was to come. Somebody out at Berkeley seems to have a very limited knowledge of the cinema. Robert Montgomery never filmed, nor did Raymond Chandler ever write, anything called *The Lady of the Lake*. John Ford's film of the Graham Greene novel was never called *The Power and the Glory*† (it was of course *The Fugitive*). And then I came to a film title I had never heard of before, *Les Premières Désillusions*. Now as this comes in a list of films Bazin felt to be rather important, my curiosity was piqued, and I went back to the French text to discover, first of all, that the film was really *La Première Désillusion*. It still didn't ring a bell, so I consulted the index to the Bazin book, and found that this title was followed by the bracketed information (Carol Reed, 1948). Of course, it was *The Fallen Idol*. If I could find this out with a minimum of trouble, why didn't somebody out there do it? To be fair, in Bazin's same list appears the title *New York-Miami*. Someone must have figured that this had to be an American film, and indeed they did check it out; unfortunately it appears as *It Happened Last Night*, which was not the title of Capra's Academy Award winning comedy.

All these things are rather annoying, and do not bode well for Hugh Gray's knowledge of French or simply his ability to transcribe or transliterate. And I dare say no similarly important critical work on any subject other than the cinema would have been allowed to come off the presses of one of America's best universities with such sloppy scholarship.

Alas, this catalogue of sins is far from finished. Although I have not had the heart to compare every page of the Gray text with the Bazin original, I did go through about half the essays making comparisons with the French, and I found some very disturbing items. I was prompted to this dreary task by coming across some phrases in the translation which I simply could not understand, even with the aid of dictionaries—like, for example, a reference Gray makes to 'Scorpio's stick.' Astrological? Zoological? No help from the dictionary. And then I discovered that this is a translation of 'le bâton de

*WHAT IS CINEMA? By André Bazin: essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray. (University of California Press/Cambridge University Press, 46s.)

†This is, however, the real title for the William K. Howard film which Gray calls *Thomas Garner*.

Scapin, a reference to the well-known Molière play *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. It would seem that not only can Mr. Gray not transliterate, he seems also to have difficulty in just reading. Other examples: Gray refers to 'a waiting dream', which makes no sense in context; but now, even before checking Bazin, I began to be able to figure it out: it must be 'waking' dream. And that in fact is what it turned out to be: 'rêve éveillé'. This explains perhaps why he refers to the translations of Edgar Allan Poe by Flaubert. Baudelaire/Flaubert: both sound quite alike.

But even this key did not help much with the following phrase: "The stylistic repertory of a director such as Hitchcock, for example, ranged from the power inherent in the dénouement as such, to superimpositions, to large close-ups." The *dénouement as such*: what could it mean? Incapable of finding a word that sounded even vaguely like dénouement, I was forced back to Bazin to discover that these words were supposed to be a translation of 'document brut'. Now how *document brut* could sound to someone like *dénouement* would need the advice of a linguistic specialist.

On page ten of Gray one finds the astonishing statement: "André Malraux has described the cinema as the furthestmost evolution to date of plastic realism, the beginnings of which were first manifest at the Renaissance and which found a limited expression in baroque painting." No, surely, plastic realism was one of the key features of the baroque. Gray had done it again: he had either misread *expression limite* as *expression limité*—or perhaps he just doesn't know the difference.

Elsewhere, when Bazin talks about being able to see a 'mythe en filigrane', Gray translates it as 'The symbol appears in clearer outline in the filigree of the myth,' which doubtless will make many people think that these French are just too pretentious. But of course in this sense, 'filigrane' means 'watermark' and what Bazin is quite straightforwardly saying is that underneath the surface you can see (as with a watermark) the underlying myth. Another stumping phrase of Gray's is 'tragicomedy of the machine' which turns out to be simply a misreading and/or translation of 'tragicomédie à machines', a reference to the elaborate stage machinery used in certain plays.

Further examples: whatever 'la matière du récit' means, it does not signify 'the matter under recital', which is nonsense in English. 'Emporter notre croyance' can be translated in many ways: 'bear away our faith' is not one of them. 'Ressources expressives' does not mean 'resourceful ways of expressing things'; 'mettre en cause' does not mean 'put to the test'; 'accomplissement' should often be translated as achievement or fulfilment; seldom, and certainly not in the case on page 16, as accomplishment.

When we come to the admittedly difficult problem of translating French *film* vocabulary, the book really goes to pieces. 'Découpage' does not mean 'the cut'; 'finely broken-down montage' is not adequate for 'morcellement à l'extrême'; and whatever 'plan-sequence' may be, it is not a 'one-shot sequence', which means rather a shot with only one person in it. This Gray seems dimly to have realised, because twelve pages later he has finally found a better solution: 'single-shot sequence'. But has he or anyone else noticed this and gone back and corrected the earlier version? No.

So then, sloppy, inaccurate, misleading; what else? Inelegant, too. Anyone with any sensitivity to language could never come out with phrases like 'filmic firmament', or 'fans (!) of *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*', or 'maidens' for *jeunes filles*. And who at the California Press let pass the following incomprehensible footnote: 'C.F.C.L.E. Magny, *L'Age du Roman Américain*.' What it means of course is cf. Claude-Edmond Magny; only as the French generally write it Cl.-E. Magny, poor careless Mr. Gray has turned Cl. into C.L. But you would think someone would have noticed that incomprehensible series of capital letters and checked it out. C.F.C.L.E., indeed!

No, this book is a disgrace. A disgrace to Bazin, a disgrace to his translator, a disgrace to the publishers, a disgrace, *quoi!* Bad enough that it should have taken so long, bad enough

that the selection be so limited and weak (why not the long essay on Welles?), but that this watered-down Bazin should be also distorted is too much. *J'accuse* . . . everybody who had a hand in this undertaking.

* * *

Going back to Bazin after all these years (the real thing, I mean, and not the travesty of his work put out in English) is something like meeting an old and respected teacher after one has left school. To be sure, one has been influenced by the

"L'ANNEE DERNIERE A MARIENBAD": DELPHINE SEYRIG,
GIORGIO ALBERTAZZI.



man, but one always wonders what he will sound like *now*. Will the old prof have kept up? Will he (or she) who defended Auden and Kafka have the 'right' views on Beckett and Pinter? Or is he still stuck with his own generation? In Bazin's case, the problem is complicated for the simple reason that he is dead; that he died ten years ago, before, for example, either Resnais or Godard had made a feature film.

Is it unreasonable to expect that a critic one had so admired, read at a formative period in one's thinking, should also be a prophet? In other words, can one expect from a critic, however great, any more than that he should be able to explain, defend, or enlarge one's views of his contemporaries? Isn't that enough? Wouldn't the distinction between the artist and the critic lie precisely there: the critic deals with what already exists, the artist is capable of significant prophecy?

These, in any case, were the ideas going through my mind when the English translation of Bazin prompted me to open up the four volumes of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, and at the same time, to look up the article on Bazin which I wrote for this magazine nine years ago. Then, influenced no doubt by the climate of the period, I wrote that "Bazin's most important contribution to film aesthetics was the re-evaluation of *montage*." The trouble, I said, with earlier French critics was that they felt "that the cinema could be an art, but that they had to defend its right to be considered as such rather than simply a method of reproduction. So they fastened on the idea of *montage*, as proof that the cinema was an art form. The image itself, as a photograph of reality was, they said, only the raw material; it was the arrangement of the succession of images that could make the cinema an art . . ." So while the aesthetic critics, prisoners of their theories, appreciated only Marcel L'Herbier, *Caligari*, and *à la rigueur*, René Clair, "Bazin's predecessor and mentor Roger Leenhardt was boosting the American comedies, gangster movies, and films of social protest. Leenhardt, even before Bazin, appreciated the films of Jean Renoir—their lack of formalism, of carefully composed and consciously beautiful images, and their non-reliance on the classic elements of *montage*."

A lot of water has passed over that particular dam in the last ten years, and doubtless Bazin, were he alive, would be the first to have admitted it—or probably, rather, the first to have *seen* it. At the time, it seemed to him that "the trend which began with Renoir, towards less and less *montage*, longer and longer sequences, was intensified by Orson Welles, and continued by Visconti, Rossellini, and the younger French school. It is implied by composition in depth, allowing the director to show action without constant cross-cutting . . . *Montage* unduly restricted the meaning of a given scene or event: the possibility of a richer, freer interpretation was the great advantage of the new method."

* * *

The cinema since 1959 has not borne out this prediction. It used to be said disparagingly by some people that Resnais films would in twenty years time turn out to look just like those dreadful films of Marcel L'Herbier. Actually, the prediction was in part true; it is just that some of those L'Herbier films (*L'Argent*, for example) look pretty good right now. Action, reaction; the way of the generations. Gertrude Stein once said that we all tend to resemble our grandparents more than our mothers and fathers, and this is often true in the arts, where the creator skips back over the immediately preceding generation to find inspiration in what his predecessors were reacting against: the dialectical method, in a sense.

And so we find Resnais making very good use of the despised principles of *montage*—each shot becomes shorter and shorter. And the same is true of the later Godard, as well as of the later Antonioni. But of course, as an old history professor of mine used to tell his class on the first day of the term: "Gentlemen, remember these two things: History always repeats itself; History never repeats itself." In spite of the hundreds of brief shots in *Deux ou Trois Choses* or *Muriel*, the principle behind these films is more the spirit of *collage*

than of what used to be called *montage*. Furthermore, there are, at least in *Deux ou Trois Choses*, some very long takes as well. This is possible because the spirit of what Bazin had to say about *montage* has been—I was going to say *respected* by Godard and Resnais, but perhaps that is placing the role of the critic too high—digested by the newer film-makers. They, too, grew up with Bazin, just as Bazin grew older with them. When Godard wrote his famous essay, *Montage mon beau souci*, it was as part of a dialogue with Bazin, a kind of 'answer' to his piece *Montage interdit*.

And in these important works of Resnais, Godard, etc. one does find that although the films contradict some of Bazin's predictions, they also 'compose' with them. These men, as much as Bazin and his favourite directors, believe in 'reality', the continuity of dramatic space and time, the absence of expressionism, the creating of that sense of ambiguity which Bazin found so important. Their *montage* (or *collage*) does not impose the director's view to the exclusion of all others. In their films, *montage* is not used to *supersede* reality, to 'improve' it, or to heighten it. It is rather the formal pattern imposed on reality, a rejection of the idea that form exists only to *express* content. They deny that form can only play this rather humiliating and secondary role. For Godard and the others, form can *structure* reality, it can become something like James's 'figure in the carpet'. And the greater and greater fragmentation of reality proceeded not from any expressionistic reasons, but for almost purely formal ones: the creation of a dialectical tension between reality and abstraction—cinema and *vérité*.

Doubtless Bazin would have been the first to understand this, because he firmly believed that theories of the cinema should be constructed on the basis of the films actually being made. For him, there was no such abstract entity as 'cinema'. The nature of the art changed with each new film: an aesthetic is founded, he said, on what *is*.

By now, of course, many of Bazin's battles have been won: few serious critics would still pretend that a filmed play (like *Les Parents Terribles*) is not 'real' cinema (although recently when *Dutchman* came out, one did hear a few last-ditch murmurs to this effect). His belief that the wall between the novel and the film had broken down has been amply confirmed by the ever-growing number of novelists who, like Malraux, have made their own films directly for the screen: Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, etc. His defence of Rossellini was, as it were, taken over by Godard, who *proved* in his own films the value of Rossellini.

Once in a while, of course, Bazin was guilty of overpraising a director because his films fitted better with his theories: the most famous case was his placing Wyler higher than John Ford. His defence of the film about art now seems to us a little too pedagogically inspired. And if his attacks on Hawks and Hitchcock seem too violent, one must remember that they were a reaction to the deification of these two directors by the younger members of the *Cahiers* team. But his attacks on a too strict interpretation of the *Politique des Auteurs* now not only seem just, but have been embraced by those very critics and directors of the *Cahiers* group whom he was attacking.

At the time I wrote my *SIGHT AND SOUND* piece on Bazin in 1959, it was as part of a two instalment article on Agee and Bazin. Looking back at that now, it seems almost ludicrous how prudent I was in claiming that Bazin's work was ultimately of more importance to the cinema than Agee's. One can still, of course, read Agee with pleasure, but more as an essayist whose subject happened to be the cinema than as a film critic or film theoretician—which of course Agee never was or pretended to be. But Bazin left behind him not only his work, but also a whole generation of film-makers who, although they may have rejected some of his ideas, may have reacted against others, were always obliged to take him into account. And that surely is a monument of which any critic could be proud. My initial fears on reopening Bazin were vain indeed: in fact, they remind me now of the old Mark Twain story about the young man with a stupid father. Returning home from university, the young man was amazed to find out how much the old man had learned in those four years.



FILM REVIEWS

REBELLION

THE WISEST WAY to get along in this world now is to avoid a fight,' murmurs the eighteenth-century Japanese nobleman, presiding comfortably over a demonstration of bloodless swordplay in which the only victim is a straw scarecrow. Two hours and a large pile of killings later, *Rebellion* (Orb) has proved how absolutely right he is, supporting its case through the story of yet another of those single-handed revolts against convention which recur with what seems like increasing frequency in Japanese cinema.

In this example, the established order, secure on its throne of traditional omnipotence, invites trouble by calmly discarding its Lord's mistress on to the reluctant family of the fastest sword in the territory, and two years later stealing her back again. Her enforced father-in-law, a restlessly retired samurai spoiling for a fight, takes the unheard-of step of challenging the action of the Clan Elders and destroys himself and his family in resisting what he regards as

tyranny. Both sides in the confrontation act irrationally by alternately sticking to the medieval/modern code or bending it to breaking point when its precepts become inconvenient—and as Kobayashi's ending packs the samurai's grand-daughter back into the same closed society as before, with instructions to continue being awkward, we have to assume that no easy solution is available to the stated problem of reconciling the letter of the law with its spirit. What *has* been demonstrated is that brute force, temporarily gratifying as it may be, makes for a spectacularly invalid argument either for or against.

Not, on the face of it, a particularly original statement; certainly Kobayashi has made it before, and in some ways more effectively, with *Harakiri*, in which the overt barbarism of the Elders is first scorned and then neatly matched by the man they have wronged. As *Rebellion* was co-produced by its star, Toshiro Mifune, the bias of the picture is not unnaturally weighted, visually as well as dramatically, in his favour—even though underneath it all the story-line makes the muffled suggestion that this aggressive samurai is merely an upstart who at long last has an excuse to work off a class grudge against his betters. The splendid Mifune scowl, and the instant authority with which he dominates the screen, give him such seemingly unquestionable heroic integrity that his glee at the idea of a fight is disturbingly easy to share. Yet the flaw in his armour is arrogance, and the crucial scene in which he fiercely orders the young couple, who have just become resigned to separation, to think only of themselves and not of the family, puts him into exactly the same position of callous autocracy as the far less appealing crew of nobles who started the trouble.

Fortunately, Kobayashi doesn't allow Mifune entirely to obscure this affinity: the ironic angle-shots of his futile death charge are suggestive more of the sub-human than of the superman, and his corpse is briefly compared with those of the men he has killed, in a comment of rather scathing equalisation. In violence, nobody wins, and all that's left after the fighting is the resumption of negotiations by the next generation. So why fight? But the question is one that *Rebellion* disturbingly answers for itself as Mifune exuberantly polishes off

a houseful of adversaries foolish enough not to possess one musket between them, and finally pins the heavy-eyed villain of the piece to the front door with one thrust. The professional fighter is a craftsman like any other, and his work has all the beauty of precision-planned choreography. The art of killing has seldom looked more seductive.

Ultimately, then, *Rebellion* tends uncomfortably to resemble the ready-made Western adaptation that must surely follow—even to the classic moment, straight out of Fairbanks, when the hero tests his skill by decapitating a candle, or when the two friends forced into unwanted opposition face each other for the showdown. It has, too, an occasional air of having been somewhat hurriedly put together (a microphone still hovers overhead at one point), and the punctuating shots of temple roofs, the obligatory duel amid wind-blown grass, and slightly self-conscious views of the action as seen from a distant high altitude, convey a feeling of paucity of inspiration rather than genuine involvement. But these are minor complaints and to compensate there are a host of riches, one of which, quite simply, is Kazuo Yamada's photography. The opening shots of Mifune's shining blade, slipping out of focus to show us his face and then as easily back to the sword, magnificently set the tone of menace which hovers throughout the long narrative development until the ultimate, unavoidable conflict—in which the same shot recurs. And there are such pleasing touches as the footprints the samurai plants all over the neatly-raked soil of his garden while plotting the disruption of the entire community, or the concentrated spotlight that surrounds the cluster of Elders as they incredulously read his letter of defiance.

Whatever the relevance, Mifune's own blazing personality is irrefutable, and Tatsuya Nakadai, the ferocious swordsman of *Harakiri*, makes a perfect alter ego. Together they intriguingly represent the two sides of the Japanese character—one half a total dedication to the rules of the social game, the other a dourly questioning antipathy to the laws of bureaucracy. When Nakadai smoothly requests, to the consternation of his superiors, an increase in salary and in sphere of responsibility if he is to accept 'promotion' to the task of stamping out rebellion, the film cuts sweetly

to the bone of legal principle and lays it bare and clean. If Kobayashi has made what looks suspiciously like a commercial pot-boiler, he has in the process lost neither his command of dramatic tension nor his sense of humour.

PHILIP STRICK

POINT BLANK

DURING THE last couple of years the character of Hollywood movies has been affected by the popularity of free-style films from Europe and the altered attitude at home of the industry's own censorship requirements and those of the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, which is now giving awards to pictures that once would have received its 'Condemned' rating. Both the 'C' change and the sea-change are to be seen at their most extreme in *Point Blank* (M-G-M), a film that is interesting for a variety of reasons, quite apart from the reflection that it would make the late Louis Mayer spin in his tomb—a thought that occurred to me during the picture when the central character visits his wife's grave in a Los Angeles cemetery and passes a yellow mechanical grab coolly excavating a hole for another anonymous corpse.

It is interesting as a first-class thick-ear thriller that grips from beginning to end; as a dazzling American debut by John Boorman; as an even more remarkable case than *Bonnie and Clyde* of the imaginative feedback into Hollywood of New Wave borrowings; and as the latest film starring Lee Marvin, whose place alongside Julie Andrews as the biggest box-office draw of the moment is both a tribute to his impressive screen presence and some sort of comment on our times.

Without Marvin the film would probably never have been made, or, having been made, achieved its popular success; for to a large extent the aggressive, forward-

thrusting, impassive Marvin contains the meaning of the picture. At only one point does he smile, and that is when his wife, just before her suicide, recalls an unregainable past happiness: in a dreamy silent flashback he registers this brief show of emotion. Marvin's current position deserves an essay in itself, inasmuch as he has shifted to the centre of movies without substantially changing the nature or depth of his roles. Briefly one might say that Julie Andrews is the hawk's favourite dove and Marvin the dove's favourite hawk.

The movement of *Point Blank* is circular. The film begins at the deserted Alcatraz federal prison in San Francisco Bay, where a middle-aged thug called Walker (Marvin) has been left for dead by his wife and partner who have cheated him out of his share of a hi-jacking operation. It ends after Walker has gone rung by murderous rung up a criminal syndicate's chain of command to regain his \$93,000, only to find himself back at Alcatraz facing the syndicate's boss Fairfax, who under an alias has been offering advice and assistance throughout the pursuit. The baffled Walker withdraws impotently into an abandoned cell, and the film closes with a desolating long shot of a mist-shrouded Alcatraz.

The outline of this plot comes from Richard Stark's novel *The Hunter*, as does the idea of the freelance crook up against the faceless syndicate which his treacherous ex-partner has joined. But whereas Godard used Stark's *Série Noire* novel *The Jugger* merely as a springboard for *Made in U.S.A.*, Boorman and his scriptwriters (Alexander Jacobs, David Newhouse and Rafe Newhouse) use *The Hunter* as a trampoline. They transform the story by leaving out all but the barest suggestion of motivation, by introducing Fairfax as a mysteriously ubiquitous figure like Arkadin in *Confidential Report*, and by the movie's style, which owes a good deal to Welles, Truffaut, Godard and, above all, Resnais. They have also changed the setting from New York to California, and mostly Los Angeles, where the syndicate becomes as much a part of

what Alison Lurie called *The Nowhere City* as the characters of *Muriel* are of Resnais' 'Nowhere City', Boulogne. And for all the occasional artiness of *Point Blank*, its self-consciousness is less an indication of self-indulgence than of a director and writers supremely confident of what they are doing.

Like Lang and Hitchcock before him, Boorman has found in California a resonant reality to be manipulated instead of one to be created, as in his first film *Catch Us If You Can*. In his first feature, where he was gravely handicapped by the obligatory presence of the Dave Clark Five, Boorman was forcing his material, imposing a burden upon his London and West Country locations that they could scarcely bear, though the underlying theme of a disillusioning quest where nothing turns out to be as it seems—and even the conclusion on a deserted island with an ambiguous meeting between pursuer and pursued—is much the same.

But the quest in *Point Blank* is quite unlike that in say *Moving Target*, or *Tony Rome* and the other attempts to revive the private-eye genre of the Forties. Walker is no knight errant; the complexity of *Point Blank* lies in the style, in the omission of motivation and explanation, the flashbacks, flash-forwards and repetition, not in a tortuous story; and it does not provide an excuse for a galaxy of stars to give cameo performances with a perverse eccentricity that the new permissiveness allows. There are no false trails, few intrusions by outsiders whether ordinary citizens or police, and the syndicate is run by colourless figures with respectable names like Carter, Brewster and Fairfax who inhabit smart offices atop elegant concrete slabs or live in suburban houses redolent of gracious living.

When Walker meets Carter the scene is an upper class charity drive meeting; when Brewster returns home to find a vengeful Walker waiting, his first remark is that no one has watered the plants in his absence. They view Walker's vulgar demand for cash with contempt: Brewster carries a mere eleven dollars and the dead Carter's wallet unfolds into a string of credit cards. Against their tenuous order, Walker's weapons are the forces of disruption at his disposal—his own controlled, unpredictable psychopathic violence, and sex. His breakthrough into the syndicate hierarchy is achieved by using his wife's sister (Angie Dickinson), who has become his ex-partner's mistress.

Ultimately this superficially amoral little fable has many of the qualities of a dream—there are in fact close resemblances between *Point Blank* and Norman Mailer's fantasy of sex and violence *An American Dream*. Herein I think lies much of its power and the key to its form as a bleak, dead and often grimly funny allegory of contemporary American life, which while falling some way short of *Bonnie and Clyde* is incomparably superior to *The Happening*. With or without irony, the picture is genuinely Made in U.S.A.

PHILIP FRENCH

"POINT BLANK": HELICOPTER AT ALCATRAZ.



TELL ME LIES

LIKE FAR FROM VIETNAM, Peter Brook's film *Tell Me Lies* (London Continental) is concerned not so much with the war in Vietnam as with our own attitudes to the war. We are inevitably involved with Vietnam through the daily bombardment of actuality on television and in the press, and

yet this very immediacy paradoxically makes us all the more aware of our non-involvement, of our impotence in the face of a war waged out there in the paddy fields and conducted by computers in the Pentagon. It's a muddled war and it produces muddled attitudes; and this is a muddled mess of a film.

But is it a necessary corollary that critical reaction to the film should also be muddled? In a way, of course, it is, since the film consciously and unconsciously reflects a set of Anglo-Saxon attitudes, and it is a reasonable assumption that critics will be no clearer than the next man in their attitudes to the war. "Sooner or later you are forced to the realisation that any real debate upon Vietnam is impossible because in this area of dispute language ceases to have any meaning," began one critic, and his pessimism is supported by double-think from all quarters. Peter Brook stands accused of everything from "flabby moralising" to "intellectual arrogance" (don't you dare tell me that you've been caring while I haven't). James Cameron, who appears in the film, is reported as saying that the whole thing must be the work of the C.I.A.; one critic tells us that the edge is blunted because "we're seeing this sort of thing on TV all the time"; another sees the film as anti-pacifist; nearly all attack it for its confusion and then complain that it never strikes an attitude (split motive, self-destructive, no attempt at evaluation, and so on).

Critical reactions are relevant, I think, because they throw light on the film's central theme. Most revealing of all perhaps is the critic who tells us that the film "adds up to that grand muddle of half-baked thoughts and unhelpful emotion which, to be fair, is a reflection of popular attitudes of all shades." Notice those words "to be fair." They are of course the giveaway. If the film does fairly reflect popular attitudes to Vietnam, then might it not be conceivable that this was one of its aims? When the columnist Peregrine Worsthorne, who also appears, complained on television that the film is "bad as propaganda and bad as art," Peter Brook very reasonably replied that "it is better to face honest bafflement than pseudo-clarity."

Tell Me Lies juxtaposes extracts from Brook's stage production *US* with fantasy, actuality material, impromptu discussions, improvisations, reconstructions in London of events that happened in Washington, all loosely built on a framework provided by an actor from the Royal Shakespeare Company (Mark Jones) who is brought face to face with the war by a magazine photograph of a mutilated Vietnamese child.

Haunted by this abrupt realisation that Vietnam is something more than an emotive word, he sets off on a pilgrimage round London to discover what he and others really think about the war. He watches protest demonstrations; gatecrashes a party at which a group of Labour M.P.s fatuously sidetrack his questions ("Napalm's a very ancient weapon—it was used by the Byzantines against the Turks") or tell him that he's naive, and Kingsley Amis advocates sending a British force to the war; listens to Stokely Carmichael coolly explaining his theory of the Third World; visits a Buddhist Vihara in North London; dreams of burning down the American Embassy. Behind this framework RSC actors interpolate hectoring songs from *US* or impetuous Americans (an embassy official, a helicopter pilot); the self-immolation of the Quaker Norman Morrison is reconstructed



"REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE".

in Grosvenor Square; Soho clubs stand in for Saigon brothels; a group of Hampstead intellectuals earnestly debate the issue round a kitchen table; Glenda Jackson passes through wielding the little red book or proclaiming violent revolution.

The trouble with all this is not so much that Brook mixes his levels, or uses sub-Brechtian devices (as the stage production did), as that the levels never really cohere. If a kaleidoscope of effects like this is to work, the different levels should be subordinate to and part of a central idea. Here they obstinately remain bits and pieces linked by artifice. And the balance between the staged and the real is upset by the slightly self-conscious framework at the centre, so that the final shot, with the camera freezing on a white wall as Mark Jones wonders if the atrocity photograph will walk through the door of his flat, is much less effective as a direct challenge to the audience than the end of the stage production (better, of course, if the film could have simply run on).

But to say that the weakness of *Tell Me Lies* is that its levels fail to cohere is not the same as saying that it ought to have a coherent point of view. It is missing the point of the film to attack it for the attitudes reflected within it. "Much of the talk on both sides is plain bosh: so that in the end both hawks and doves merely add up to a lot of twitter" is only a comment on the film if Brook is presenting these attitudes (on either side) as his own—which he very clearly is not. So with the charge that the actors standing in for real people are too conspicuously actors (of course they are), or that the personalities should be identified (provided that their views are not distorted, it is what they say rather than who they are that matters), or that the debate round the kitchen table is on a sixth-form level (that may well be so, but it is far from untypical of the kind of debate that is taking place round many a kitchen table).

The real failure of the film is rather that in attempting to reflect in jigsaw fashion the incoherence of our thinking about Vietnam (and Brook's suggestion that the Vietnam

situation is reflected in London), the pieces of the jigsaw never quite make up a recognisable picture.

Tell Me Lies is an honest attempt to confront a confusion of ideas. The question (underlined by the critical reactions) is how far Brook was right to let this necessary confusion extend so far beyond content into form.

DAVID WILSON

REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE

THE MOST CONSISTENT FEATURE of John Huston's very diverse output is a certain brisk directness of style. He is not necessarily incapable of subtlety, but he prefers to state rather than to imply, to drive straight through the middle of a subject rather than circle it warily first. This means that his failures—like most of *The Bible*—are startlingly shameless and undisguised. But the manly, neck-or-nothing approach can also work astonishingly well with a lot of otherwise intractable material. We last saw it doing so in that weird hodge-podge *Casino Royale*, where only the Huston episode at the beginning made no attempt at subtlety and no bones about playing it up to the hilt as farce. This worked, while everyone else was much too clever by half. Now, right at the other end of the dramatic scale, Huston's direct attack has paid off with an almost equally surprising success in his version of Carson McCullers' elusive novella *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (Warner-Pathé).

The story is one of those overheated essays in Southern Baroque. It all takes place on a military station in Georgia, and everybody in sight is very peculiar indeed. The major is a sly fetishist with an overpowering nostalgia for the simple masculine comradeship of his young soldiering days and an obsessive yen for one of the young soldiers on the station. His wife, who despises him,



"MY WAY HOME": ANDRAS KOZAK, SERGEI NIKONENKO.

divides her time between the neighbouring colonel and her beautiful stallion. The soldier who is the object of the major's attention divides his time between looking after the horses (and riding round the countryside "bare-backed and bare-assed," as the major's lady elegantly puts it) and brooding silently and undetected in the major's wife's room at night. The colonel's wife is also on the odd side ("She tried to cut off her nipples with garden shears—do you call that normal?"), and so is her visionary Philippino servant, who plays a rather mysterious and undefined role in the development of the plot.

The mind boggled, in prospect, at how on earth all this could turn out on screen. And would Huston, of all people, be the right director to put it there, supposing it could be done? In the event, he has carried it off simply by ignoring, or seeming to ignore, the difficulties altogether. Equipped with a script by Chapman Mortimer and Gladys Hill which follows the original with a remarkable degree of literal fidelity, Huston has done likewise. The more extraordinary inventions of the original are put straight on to the screen as though they are the most normal things in the world. Quite a lot of the film is funny, especially in the character of Leonora, the major's wife and virtually the only reasonably sane person around (Elizabeth Taylor). But the sort of unconscious absurdity which is always waiting on the side-lines to engulf the whole enterprise never in fact does so, simply because Huston acts throughout as though it is not there.

Even so, the film obviously could never be everybody's cup of tea, despite the presence of Elizabeth Taylor, who is really very good, and Marlon Brando, who gives one of his most tiresomely perverse and self-conscious performances as her mixed-up husband. The film is anyway nearly stolen by Julie Harris, effortlessly believable as the half-mad neighbour, and by Zorro David, a New York hairdresser making his acting debut as the epicene houseboy. But all that is likely, understandably, to be caviar to

the general. So, presumably, it has proved in America, and in a natural urge to blame audience incomprehension on something, Warner-Seven Arts have lit on the odd colour process originally used.

In line with his experiments in *Moulin Rouge* and *Moby Dick*, Huston persuaded Technicolor to wash the prints in such a way as to tint the whole thing a subdued gold and remove virtually every other colour except a trace of spectral pink. After the first openings in the States the company offered exhibitors the alternative, happily seized on, of a normal, unwashed colour print; and here the film is to be shown in the untreated version. This is a pity, because atmosphere is obviously very important to such a subject, and the ghostly, tantalising look of the original contributed a lot. The film still works well enough, but the images of Private Williams lurking by Leonora's bedside in a room coloured only by the faint, almost unnoticeable pink glow from a negligée hung behind the door, or of Anacleto painting for his mad mistress's pleasure a curious, almost indecipherable image of a cockerel with one great glittering eye (revealed in full colour as a rather feeble piece of pastiche Chagall) remain indelible from the first version, reduced as they are in the second to a relative commonplace.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

HUGS & KISSES

ONE COULD, I SUPPOSE, define Jonas Cornell's *Hugs & Kisses* (Contemporary) as an eternal triangle tale of dull husband, frustrated wife, and *pierrot lunaire* who comes between them, taking in by the way some sharp cracks at the class-consciousness and bourgeois respectability of Swedish society. To do so, however, is to find both characters and situation sliding out from under the definition. Like Pinter, Cornell simply sets down what he sees from a wryly

detached eye as two incompatibles meet head on; and like Renoir (I choose my comparisons with care) he refuses to judge, so that his characters, never delimited by their roles, keep running off in entertainingly unexpected directions.

The incompatibles in this case are John (Håkan Serner), an aspiring writer who has just been thrown out of house and home by his girl-friend, trailing an aura of vaguely proletarian bohemianism in striped T-shirt and soiled white pants; and Max (Sven-Bertil Taube), neat, suave, very much the stiff-collar executive in his father's prosperous business, an old school friend who invites John to stay for a few days. Concluding the arrangement, John automatically holds open the door (cursing himself as soon as it is done) which Max has equally automatically waited for him to open; and one hardly needs John's recollection of how Max as a schoolboy had persuaded him to swap a valuable encyclopaedia for a comic book to realise that in his new home John will find himself getting the breakfast and doing the household shopping.

But it isn't, of course, as simple as that. What follows is a deliciously funny comedy of manners in which John (though wearing his underwear) slips naturally into the role of perfect butler, but as soon as the tray is delivered in the marital bedroom, jumps on to the bed to share it in a cosy *ménage à trois*; while Max and his wife Eva (Agneta Ekman), accepting this as only his due, tend solicitously to their servant-guest's welfare. John, one senses, is an event in their stagnating marriage, and like the tramp in *The Caretaker*, he is both a unifying and disrupting influence in the household he invades. As long as he is content, Max and Eva find a new pleasure in each other; but when he grows restless, wanting a girl of his own, they quarrel. With the household reeling under the impact of giggly Kickan (Lena Granhagen), the brassy typing-instructress he brings home to bed, something has to be done. And after being sent out to forage for grilled rattlesnakes for Kickan's birthday party—shortly to be attended by a horde of alarmingly precocious monster children who threaten to destroy their way of life—they find a solution. Eva sets out to seduce John to keep him happy, and succeeds so well that in a complete reversal of roles Max is now left out in the cold.

The element of *marivaudage* is beautifully managed, with an easy grace which is a far cry from the faintly ridiculous sexual angst we have long been accustomed to in Swedish cinema. Tea and sex, for instance, are wittily rhymed in a sequence which starts with John, happy to feel needed, dashing off to make tea while an amorous Max and Eva try to persuade him to go to the cinema instead—without success until, told that *Hatari!* is showing, he rushes out with wild enthusiasm. Later, with John feeling unwanted again, and hardly reconciled by an entertainment consisting of a mating dance from Eva and a re-enactment of her romantic first meetings with Max, the star attraction is brought out as a persuader ("Tea! . . . Yum-yum!").

But underlying this cool surface is a strange, yearning note as the characters reach out after some unrealised facet of themselves. "When I was a kid I could walk like Gary Cooper . . ." says Max with pensive surprise, pursuing some private vision of himself. Listening to a lecture on Pre-Raphaelite art and Lizzie Siddal's patience when posing as drowning Ophelia ("No one knew what she thought as she lay

day after day in Millais' bath-tub"), Eva rushes home after coming to some sort of decision about her own passivity, and gives herself to John. And John himself, with all his tales of adventure and South American journeys, carries his own domesticity round with him like a shell, setting up home wherever he happens to be with his pillow, his typewriter, and the furry cat-skin he likes to snuggle up to in bed.

The key scene in the film (butchered, unfortunately, by the censor, who took exception to the display of pubic hair), is the one in which Max and Eva hover solicitously as John goes to bed on his first night in their flat, tucking him in and giving him his cat-skin to cuddle. Then, as Eva undresses in the next room, Max reads him a bedtime story from Jules Verne, reaching the climactic description of the discovery of the mysterious island by moonlight just as Eva stands naked, looking at her reflection in the mirror, before climbing into bed. Everything flows from this scene with its identification of Eva as the 'mysterious island', John as the explorer imaginative enough to discover it, and Max as the earthbound reader who can only wonder at its existence. The scene also suggests something of the complexity of the characters. For if John can be seen both as the adventurer who brings Max and Eva the touch of romance they lack (and which will break up their marriage), and as the child they do not have (who might save the marriage), he is also himself—the free *piérot lunaire* searching for the chains of security.

Behind its casual, apparently frivolous triangle relationship and wealth of comic detail (Cornell's gags sometimes reveal an invention worthy of Keaton, notably John's immobilisation by a door handle which he tries to open with his foot while carrying a loaded tray), *Hugs & Kisses* conceals a real frustration and a depth of feeling which has to be disentangled from the sophisticated masks presented by the characters. "Look," says Max, playing out his role as the well-bred, world-weary cuckold, and coaxing a reluctant tear for the wickedness of the world after interrupting his wife in a flirtation at a photographer's studio, "Look, a real tear of sorrow." But later, when he looks at the photographs in which he and Eva pose in a vile parody of marital bliss, his ironic comment of "She's madly happy . . . Yes, she's really gay" covers a stabbing pain. One is reminded, oddly, of *La Règle du Jeu* and its *bal masqué* of the emotions: quite an achievement for a film which is a first for virtually everybody concerned—director, actors, cameraman and technicians.

TOM MILNE

MY WAY HOME

POETRY IS SAID to take its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity, and in this sense, as well as in its visual harmony, *My Way Home* (Contemporary) is truly poetic. Miklós Jancsó, who made that enigmatic masterpiece *The Round-Up*, has said that this earlier work is autobiographical in feeling if not in fact, and it has exactly the dreamlike quality, rooted in reality but remembered at several removes, that is produced by the subconscious selections and distortions of memory. The reality on which this process has worked was a cruel and chaotic one—Hungary in 1945 as the Red Army advanced across the battle-

scarred countryside, the roads crowded with refugees, deserters, collaborators, prisoners, every sort of human flotsam, all fleeing westward and none knowing who he might trust.

Jancsó uses a bewildered Hungarian schoolboy as his protagonist. Captured by the Russians, released, recaptured, and set to work with a young Russian soldier looking after a herd of cows, he is freed only by the death of the Russian, with whom he has by then struck up a wordless friendship. But freedom brings a beating from his compatriots, who take him for a collaborator. The film ends, like *Les Quatre Cents Coups*, on a frozen image of the young man facing an unknown future.

This is the stuff of nightmare and it has all the frightening illogicality of a dream. The bleached plain of the cow pasture seems to stretch for mile on mile, as deserted as the mountains of the moon, yet people constantly appear and as suddenly vanish, travelling apparently from nowhere to nowhere. Horror is always kept just around the corner. Prisoners are shot, cows are blown up, the young Russian dies in agony, but all out of camera range. Unbelievably, the impression of the film as a whole is sunny, gentle, humorous. Here the mature memory is choosing the best and rejecting the worst, as we mercifully tend to do in middle age. (Jancsó was forty-four when he made the film in 1964.) And the best in this case is the relationship which develops between two ordinary boys thrown accidentally together by the fortune of war. Isolated in their ruined hut in the middle of a rolling grassy plain, they are in the uniquely intimate situation of Olmi's workmen in *Time Stood Still* or Polanski's weekenders in *Knife in the Water*. But there is the additional complication that they have no common language. The Russian is lively and ebullient, the Hungarian quiet and withdrawn. Moreover they are captor and captive.

Jancsó explores their reactions in a series of typically oblique incidents. We see the Russian shooting to stop his fleeing prisoner before we are told that the

Hungarian was running into a minefield. And we are encouraged to smile at the Russian boy's preoccupation with his health for some time before it is revealed that he has good cause for concern—an old wound is troubling him. But people do misunderstand each other's motives; it is one of the great roots of dissension, and Jancsó is using these two, in a subtle, non-didactic way, as a microcosm. Just as he avoids preaching, he steers clear of sentimentality when the friendship ripens. The boys work, eat and play together, shooting at frogs, chasing a girl, cooking a cow that has strayed among the mines. It is all done with the greatest good humour, and the Hungarian's refusal of a chance to escape because it would get his friend into trouble becomes entirely natural.

In other hands this kind of thing could easily have become an academic exercise in Russo-Hungarian reconciliation, but Jancsó keeps it far away from propaganda and his attitude to the Red Army is confined to an amused tolerance of bureaucracy. This is typified by the sergeant who, having checked out five prisoners to fetch water, cannot cope with finding six on their return, so lets the surplus man go free. Visually the film does not achieve the cold perfection of *The Round-Up*, but its mood calls for a more fluid approach. The photography is bleached, sharp, elegant, the cutting staccato. A strange, evocative, deeply personal work.

BRENDA DAVIES

ELVIRA MADIGAN

THE STORY OF Bo Widerberg's *Elvira Madigan* (Academy/Connoisseur) is simple enough. Sixten, Count Sparre, a cavalry officer in the Swedish army in 1889, deserts his regiment for a tightrope walker, Elvira Madigan. For a few summer weeks, under assumed identities, they flit from hotel to hotel, picnicking in the woods, making an existence by selling their few

"HUGS & KISSES": HAKAN SERNER, AGNETA EKMANNER, SVEN-BERTIL TAUBE.





"THE CHAMPAGNE MURDERS": MAURICE RINET.

possessions, fishing in the lakes, eating wild fruit and roots; then, inevitably—we are told the outcome at the beginning—they commit suicide. And on this straightforward narrative level the film works staggeringly well. It is a devastating-to-look-at-and-listen-to concert piece, with ravishing colour photography (Jörgen Persson), evocative period detail, and lyrical combinations of Mozart, silence, and natural noises on the soundtrack. The playing is impeccable, Thommy Berggren and Pia Degermark giving the lovers the beauty, dignity and defencelessness which the director's whole-hearted acceptance of his theme requires (Widerberg also wrote the script). On a first viewing, I was dazzled. When I saw it for the second time, though, I began to ask questions.

The simpler the subject matter of a work of art the more attention shifts towards its maker. In this case, the peculiar Swedishness of the treatment becomes apparent. Widerberg is not telling the sort of love story in which A loves B, B hesitates, B loves A; or the sort in which A loves B, and B loves A but doesn't know it; in fact, emotional development as such is entirely absent from his film. Sixten loves Elvira and Elvira loves Sixten: the absolutism of the statement goes unquestioned, as the Virgin and Child relationship goes unquestioned in Renaissance art. The film begins in the middle of things—Sixten and Elvira are lying in a sunlit meadow on the edge of a wood—and the preliminary stages of their commitment to each other are never mentioned.

Elvira Madigan celebrates the idea of sexual love as something admirable, exclusive, and in the end impossible. The film is so constructed that by the time the audience

learns that Sixten has a wife and children we are already won over to him; if he has a moral struggle when his brother officer (Lennart Malmer) finds him and seeks to persuade him to return, it is not one which we feel inclined to share. But what are the terms in which this love is described? Not erotic, to begin with: this isn't *Summer with Monika*. And it will hardly do to say that since it isn't obviously physical it must be spiritual, since the film doesn't suggest that either.

The answer probably lies in the way Widerberg regards his heroine. If the film has a viewpoint, it is Sixten's; and Sixten and Elvira are not on entirely the same level. Sixten shares with the audience concerns and responsibilities which Elvira doesn't; he is a Swede, an officer, a member of the nobility, a family man. Elvira isn't even Swedish, and Elvira Madigan is not her real name. Sixten is to Elvira merely a man (though, as she says, 'the best'), but Elvira to Sixten is more than a mere girl. In one sense his feeling for her seems to be confused with every Swede's passionate nostalgia for nature; he is like those stockbrokers and account executives who every summer desert Stockholm for the lakes and forests of the north, seeking in an absence of hot and cold running water the source of their inner being.

It would be going too far—and it would be doing violence to Pia Degermark's solid performance—to claim that Elvira is some sort of personification of the summer, nature, or the forest landscape; but that the myth-making tendency is there is beyond doubt. And the terms in which Sixten's love are described are, appropriately, the natural images of misty mornings, grass, trees, placid stretches of water, deserted roads,

meadows, bread, cheese, raspberries and cream, sunlight. "The world is nothing without grass," he says.

The closer one examines it, the less truly reciprocal their relationship becomes. Elvira is even raised symbolically above Sixten by the fact of her being a tightrope walker, a creature who can defy gravity, weightless, as a vampire is said to cast no shadow (the breathtaking scene in which she practises alone in the forest on a clothesline borrowed from the hotel is central to the film's repertoire of imagery). And the more one examines Widerberg's apparent concentration upon physical detail, the more it reveals itself as being an indulgence in the merely picturesque. The pink, well-scrubbed face of the cook (Cleo Jensen), the spilt wine and the knife, become decoration round the film's emotional thrust towards abstraction, a kind of metaphorical smokescreen. This is not to condemn it, but to define it, and also to speculate how far Widerberg understands his own talents. He commits himself to the idea of natural objects being beautiful and valuable in themselves just as he commits himself to the idea of a great love, tragic, hopeless and destructive, but ennobling; but neither commitment withstands examination.

The imagery dissolves; and one finds oneself thinking about the way in which Widerberg sides so completely with his hero, giving him the moral edge in the scenes with his brother officer, even going so far as to discredit the friend in the eyes of the audience by means of a shifty manoeuvre to get Sixten to return to his family. Ultimately, this fine and beautiful film becomes as solipsist as, say, *Persona*. And if, as Sixten says, "Perhaps we're living a life that people can't live yet," then perhaps, too, *Elvira Madigan* is groping for a reality it can't quite find.

JAMES PRICE

THE CHAMPAGNE MURDERS

CHABROL AS HITCHCOCK AGAIN in an Cornately foxy thriller, complete with transference of guilt theme, which allows free rein to his taste for the grotesque. Co-productions, however, with their hideous practice of dubbing half the actors with alien voices in each language version, are not the best medium for subtlety; and in *The Champagne Murders* (Rank), alias *Le Scandale*, some of Chabrol's nicest touches—the witless dialogue at a socialite party, the extraordinary gibbers of an excited American businessman trying to clinch a deal, or the tired tantrums of a family at dinner where the television set competes with the conversation—are not nearly as sharp as they ought to be.

This said, there is much to admire in the film, even if it isn't firing on all cylinders. There is nothing wrong with the basic situation. Christine (Yvonne Furneaux), wealthy owner of a champagne firm, is married to ex-gigolo Christopher (Anthony Perkins), best friend of Paul (Maurice Ronet), the man who put him on to a good thing by introducing him to Christine. Paul has inherited—and refuses to sell—the brand name to the champagne firm, which Christine needs if she is to make a profitable deal with American bidders. The impasse is breached by a series of murders which are blamed on Paul, who has recently suffered a brain injury in an incident in which he was

beaten up, and who gradually begins to think he must be guilty.

All this Chabrol handles with characteristic brilliance after the unsettlingly ambiguous opening, in which Paul and Christopher, driving through the woods with a prostitute they have picked up, are set upon by anonymous assailants who drag away and strangle the girl. On the one hand the mystery, with Paul waking up at dawn in a Hamburg park after a drunken spree to find his girl strangled, or coming to under a battery of lights in a painter's studio in almost identical circumstances; on the other, the atmosphere of moral vacuity, with each of the three leading characters locked away in private worlds of selfishness, greed and personal gain. Just as Rabier's superb photography enhances the mystery with its vivid use of colour and trick of keeping faces half-concealed, so Rino Mondellini's equally superb art direction makes its moral condemnation with its air of opulent artificiality—a dining-room hung with rich tapestries from which a TV set detaches itself, a bedroom designed like the wheel-house of a yacht, a flat draped with naked arc-lights like a film sound stage.

The trouble is that (unlike *L'Oeil du Malin*, where the moral criticism derived from the mystery—or vice versa), the two elements remain obstinately apart. In the very last shot, as the real murderer is discovered and struggles with Paul and Christopher, the camera lifts in an overhead shot until the trio, writhing on the floor far below, are held framed in some sort of symbolic group. All three, presumably, are equally guilty. But the real murderer is little more than a *deus ex machina*, and a rather clumsy one at that. Had it turned out to be Christine (who has in fact been murdered herself by this time), this ending might have been more satisfactory as a sort of *Huis Clos* ("Eh bien, continuons . . .") continuation of their grasping, mean-spirited efforts to do each other down.

There is no doubt that *The Champagne Murders* is a brilliant exercise in technique (just look, for instance, at that opening sequence, or the *plan-sequence* in which Christine, the secretary and Paul each sit in turn at the same chair as Paul is persuaded to sign away his name), or that Chabrol has great fun with his misanthropy (Paul's childish glee as he sprays dignified guests

with champagne at the party; Christine thoughtfully squeezing a blackhead from Christopher's back as they recline languorously in bed). But after his long sojourn in the cinema's nether regions putting new life into Marie Chantal and The Tiger, one had hoped that Chabrol would return to the level of *Les Cousins*, *L'Oeil du Malin*, *Ophelia*. In the immortal words of the schoolmaster: "Very satisfactory. Could do better if he tried."

TOM MILNE

THE CHELSEA GIRLS

ANDY WARHOL'S *Chelsea Girls*, as seen by audiences in New York, consists of two films screened side by side at the same time. Each film is a series of episodes, some in black and white and some in colour, shown in the same order but starting at different times, the whole programme playing for about four hours. The two films are similar, but not identical; and one performance tends to vary from the next so that two images are unlikely to occur on the screen at exactly the same moment more than once. The subject-matter is the lives of people living at the Chelsea Hotel on West 23rd Street in Manhattan. (Information from Gregory Battcock in his collection of writings *The New American Cinema*, Dutton, New York 1967.)

The version recently shown in London by the New Cinema Club was truncated: one screen, one image at a time, and less than two hours long. Why? Wrong reasons of practicality, one supposes. A good part of the film's intentions seem to have been to oblige audiences to question the film medium; but with the force of this reduced one tends to concentrate upon the narrative and documentary content, which is not substantial. There are the usual characteristics of independent cinema, notably a sound track on which a child bouncing a ball becomes the *c-r-r-ump* of bombs falling in the Bronx. There is Warhol's religious refusal to edit his material, so that the audience is constantly uneasily aware that the actors are constantly uneasily aware that they are in front of a camera. But in

spite of these helpful reminders to the audience that what they are watching is not to be confused with a mass-market, big-budget, or well-made film, the subject-matter shifts decisively into the foreground, as it cannot have done in New York.

The subject-matter was, of course, another matter for scandal and amazement in New York, and on that account I went along to the film hopefully. I am sorry to report, however, that as pornography the version of *The Chelsea Girls* which I saw just doesn't deliver. It is true that about two thirds of the way through a short word is used which I am told denotes the female organ; but frankly I thought this rather short change for the New American Cinema.

Instead there are relationships. Each episode is a study in some kind of connection, person-to-person or person-to-camera. The most effective are the two concerning a man describing himself as a Pope, hearing confessions and working himself up into a frightful rage about something which was obscure to me. Other episodes concern drug-takers, a group of girls living together, two homosexuals in bed, a drag queen; and if all that sounds exciting, well, I made the same mistake too. The characteristic thing about these conversations in front of the camera—unscripted, halting and self-conscious—is that the more responsible character immediately takes the lead, tending to bully the other. As a result all the relationships in *The Chelsea Girls* have a tiresomely sadistic cast.

The trouble with this kind of comment, on a film which one has good reason to believe does not represent its maker's intentions, is that one has to speculate too much. I am ready to accept all sorts of things about Warhol: the rigorous approach, which allows him to put film in his camera and point it more or less in the right direction, but permits no further refinement (except a zoom: my God, that zoom!); the complete absence of spurious appeals to the audience; the insistence on real, not cinematic, time (in *Chelsea Girls* as in *Empire* and *Sleep*); the sharing in that new sensibility which, in Susan Sontag's words, "situates itself beyond negation". But London still needs to see a complete Warhol work in its proper state to find out just what these ideas and attitudes mean.

JAMES PRICE

FRANKENHEIMER

continued from page 93

confrontation with the wife . . . what surgery could they do to prevent her from recognising her own husband?

First, I intended having Sir Laurence Olivier play both parts. But I couldn't get the picture financed with him, his box-office pull wasn't strong enough. Finally I thought, if you've got to go through this horseshit of operations and so forth, what would you want to come out looking like? Marlon Brando? He turned it down, so I tried Rock. And Rock said, "I can't manage the transformation, I'm not a good enough actor." So I said, "Why not just play the second part?" And he agreed. Suddenly I realised this was the only way to do the movie, with different actors. But we had problems: John Randolph was

right-handed and Rock left-handed, their hairlines were different, and so on.

In many ways, I adored the movie, but we always knew we had a weakness in the second act, and we couldn't get rid of it. The wine-crushing scene wasn't meant to look like an orgy, by the way: in reality, it's the cleanest thing in the world. These people, most of whom are terribly attractive, strip off and get into a vat stark naked and stomp grapes. And it really is an exhilarating experience. I did it—with some inhibition. I had to get in that God-damned vat when we were shooting that thing, with a hand-held camera, in a bathing suit for modesty, but they pulled it off right away, no cheating.

Wouldn't Jimmy Wong Howe get in?

No! He was out there impeccably dressed and we were trying to figure some way to get him in, but he said, "I won't get in! I won't get in the vat!"

Have you enjoyed working in Europe, with The Train and Grand Prix?

When I first read the script of *The Train* on the plane from Los Angeles to New York I wanted to tell the pilot to turn right back. It was the worst script I'd ever read, 240 pages long and it made no sense, and it took them an hour to get the train out. I got some new writers and sat down with them in a hotel room in France for three weeks without coming out and we got a script. Finally it came up all right. Yes, I want to go on working in Europe. The crews are more enthusiastic, and I got tired of living in Seranwrap, as one does in Hollywood, and anyway I never have lived in a company town atmosphere, because I live here at the beach, at Malibu, and I don't go to Hollywood parties. Europe is where the action is: Godard, Antonioni. I want to be part of that, if I can.

BOOK REVIEWS

KING COHN, by Bob Thomas. Illustrated. Barrie & Rockliff, 35s.

HOLLYWOOD THE HAUNTED HOUSE, by Paul Mayersberg. Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 35s.

BOTH THESE BOOKS are about Hollywood, and both sell for thirty-five shillings. They have nothing else in common.

King Cohn, the only biography of Harry Cohn ever written or likely to be, runs 369 pages, has a lengthy and careful index, is generously illustrated and is a very good buy for anyone interested in the Hollywood that was. Its author, Bob Thomas, has been a Hollywood journalist for almost twenty-five years, and he has worked out his portrait of Harry Cohn with commendable doggedness, industry and integrity. It could not have been easy: unlike the heads or owners of the other studios, Cohn never made public speeches or granted interviews or appeared on radio or television, and no serious periodical devoted to the cinema ever thought it worthwhile to study the man under whom Frank Capra and others enjoyed their greatest days. As the archetypal studio head, he was the subject of literally hundreds of anecdotes and jokes, most of them apocryphal and anonymous, and it is to Thomas' credit that every incident described in the book is accompanied by its source.

Harry Cohn, who died ten years ago, was, for most of his adult life, both president and head of production of Columbia Pictures Corporation. To understand his unique position it is necessary to be aware of the historical division of power in the American film industry. From the beginning, and except briefly at Universal under Carl Laemmle, the presidencies and the real seats of power in the film companies were located in New York, in the headquarters of the sales and distribution offices. The men who ran the Hollywood studios and dealt personally with the stars and creative employees were themselves, however puissant and well-paid, no more than employees. Harry Cohn was alone in being both president and executive in charge of production; Hollywood was his domain and he had no boss. Additionally, he was the largest individual stockholder in his company. Thus, he had the power and he used it, sometimes willfully, sometimes brilliantly, always despotically. Toward the end of his life the New York executives were challenging that power, and when they achieved the right to deal with producers for films to be made away from the studio and Cohn's supervision, and these films (*On the Waterfront*, shot in New York, and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Ceylon) were successful, the handwriting was on the king's wall. The knowledge that he was sliding down toward constitutional monarchy may well have hastened his early death.

The Cohn story is, once again, in the rags to riches American tradition. He was born in poverty of immigrant parents; he saw life as a vast jungle, and he clawed and bludgeoned his way up until he became one of the six great Hollywood tycoons. But he was a late-comer, and the foundations of the great empires had already been laid when he arrived in Hollywood. The giant that is Columbia today began its life on Poverty Row. His lifelong battle was to make it achieve parity with Warners and Metro and Paramount and the other major studios, and although in the end he was successful he never lost the nagging feeling of inferiority that made him the bully he often was. From all accounts he was never a comfortable man to be with: the testimony of the book is that he was crude, vulgar, hard, suspicious, ignorant, arrogant and cruel, and at the same time shy, generous, loyal, compassionate, courageous and honest, a man of many contradictions. There is one certainty: although he was in the business of making films solely to make money, he loved every aspect of film-making, and no film ever left his studio until and unless he had approved every foot of it.

King Cohn is based almost entirely on the accounts of people who worked for or quarrelled with Harry Cohn, and it is to be

expected that many of the anecdotes are coloured by prejudice and ego. Unfortunately, Cohn himself left nothing behind of a self-revelatory nature, except the studio, and the Cohn family were reluctant, I am told, to contribute to the book. The portrait is thus necessarily somewhat one-sided, but if it fails in the always impossible task of revealing the entire man, the book succeeds in focusing sharply on the Hollywood of the Thirties, Forties and Fifties, and, to some extent, even of today. I should think that for anyone interested in Hollywood it is a necessary acquisition.

For myself, I was perhaps fortunate in never having had to work directly under Cohn, and I have no scars. In my opinion, his rudeness was in part a carry-over from the East Side social convention that requires a point to be made dramatically and loudly if it is to be made at all, and to the end of his days he was a man who had to make his point and finish his paragraph. Despite his success, he was keenly aware of his lack of education and social graces, and he always felt himself a parvenu. Again, unfortunately for his public image, he had an ironic sense of humour, and he was compelled to reply to what he considered a provocative or impertinent question with an outrageous answer, and these were always taken literally. Finally, and above all, he considered the studio to be entirely his own creation, and since he gave so much of himself to it he could not help but react emotionally and explosively whenever he felt it threatened, slighted or short-changed by the people he employed.

Two minor incidents have always made me suspect the image he helped to create. In 1951 Stanley Kramer, George Glass and I moved into the studio to begin our disastrous deal with Columbia. At that time, Cohn had quarrelled with the owner of the *Hollywood Reporter*, and the trade paper was barred from the studio. Possession of it anywhere within the confines of the kingdom was cause for immediate discharge. I did not feel bound to observe this ukase, and on our first day, after morning coffee, I took my copy of the *Reporter* to the adjacent men's room for a quiet read. When I emerged, I came face to face with Mr. Cohn, who had come up to our floor (rather graciously, when you come to think of it) to bid us welcome to his studio. Our eyes met, and then his took in the unmistakably coloured paper in my hand. There was a long pregnant moment of silence. Then his eyebrows lifted wryly, he shrugged, and he continued on his way. A few steps later, without pausing, he looked back over his shoulder and said, "Well, at least you know where to take it," and went on.

Some years later, when I was in Ceylon working on *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, I had just finished dinner at the Gallface Hotel when I was handed a note asking me to join Mrs. Cohn at a nearby table. Surprised, because none of us had been informed that the beautiful Joan Cohn had arrived in Colombo, I went over, and then realised that the middle-aged woman making a lonely world tour was Cohn's first wife, whom he had divorced after he had become rich and successful. I think she thought I had just arrived from Hollywood. In any event, her first question was, "Tell me, how is my Harry?" There was not the slightest trace of bitterness in her voice or manner, and her warmth and concern were perfectly genuine.

* * *

If *King Cohn* is sometimes pedestrian but always conscientious about giving its readers their money's worth, *Hollywood The Haunted House* is strictly in the caveat emptor department. The book is advertised as being "a thorough and revealing guide to the conditions under which movies are made and of how Hollywood is adjusting to changing times," and it is nothing of the sort.

There is a well-written if somewhat slick introductory chapter heavily influenced by Gavin Lambert's *Slide Area*, and the balance of the book consists of interviews with Don Siegel, Richard Brooks, Blake Edwards, David Swift, Stanley Kramer, John Houseman, King Vidor, Nick Ray, Robert Aldrich, Joe Losey, Dan Taradash and Abby Mann, some of them originally published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Movie* as far back as 1963. Aside from the fact that these pieces are dated and of the usual self-serving type of interview one grants to the intellectual cinema press, it is doubtful if, with all due respect, these men are spokesmen for the changes taking place in Hollywood today; and, of course, Losey and Ray haven't been there in years.

As a result, there is no picture of what is actually happening in Hollywood today, or what in fact was happening when Mayersberg was there briefly two years ago. Indeed, some of the works in progress that are mentioned were shelved as far back as 1966, which adds to the book's feeling of fantasy. Completely ignored are the leadership the independents have taken over from the majors, the merging of studios with chain groceries, the star-producer syndrome, the breakdown in professional discipline, the influence of the larger agencies, the union problem, obsolescence in both manpower and machines, the impact of European and British films and the influx of the new creative talent now beginning to dominate the Hollywood scene. Instead there are a lot of dull life-stories and

some naive assumptions that betray a basic ignorance of how films are really made, but all based on the gospel as established by *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Movie*.

In Mr. Mayersberg's book, all directors are heroic, all writer-producers are villains and all producers are somewhat caddish entrepreneurs who just won't let the heroes get on with it. Let the director direct and the producer promote, Mayersberg demands, virtuously. Ah, if only it could always be so. But in real life a director can have a nervous breakdown or an unhappy love affair, fall off the wagon, take drugs, quarrel with his actors, lose his self-confidence or become over-confident, fall behind in his taxes, hate his wife, be unhappy with his children, get tired, fall ill, be a bad editor or just simply pull up lame this time out—all or any of which can and do happen, and none of which a director is likely to mention to the young man from *Movie* when discussing his latest failure, or success.

A good, competent, industrious book about Hollywood in transition would be welcome, but, sadly, this isn't it. And what makes this book even more annoying (to any professional, I think) is that Mayersberg writes well and that there are present a number of perceptions and insights which indicate that he could write an important and truthful book on Hollywood or film-making, if he took the time and trouble.

CARL FOREMAN

BOOKS RECEIVED

BOXINGANGA. By Elsa Gress. (Spectator, Copenhagen, Kr. 45.)

FILMS AND FILM-MAKERS. By Jan Kalman. (Orbis, Prague, Kcs. 10.)

FRANJU. By Raymond Durnat. (Studio Vista, 10s. 6d.)

JOHN FORD. By Peter Bogdanovich. (Studio Vista, 10s. 6d.)

LAUREL AND HARDY. By Charles Barr. (Studio Vista, 10s. 6d.)

MADE IN U.S.A. By Jean-Luc Godard. (Lorrimer, 12s. 6d.)

MAN AND THE MOVIES. Edited by W. R. Robinson. (Louisiana State University Press, \$7.95.)

LE PETIT SOLDAT. By Jean-Luc Godard. (Lorrimer, 12s. 6d.)

CORRESPONDENCE

The Big Silence

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

SIR,—For the first time I discovered a small error of fact in your magazine SIGHT AND SOUND. In his article 'The Big Silence' (Winter 1967/68) Axel Madsen writes that John Wayne is producing the first American war movie about Vietnam. This is not correct, since several other Vietnam movies have been produced by American film-makers. The movies all belong to the so-called Z-series, which may be the reason why they have remained unknown to your correspondent. Aesthetically speaking they are completely valueless; they appear to have been made at great speed and with an absolute minimum of technical and financial means. Politically speaking they have to be considered a commercial concession to what their makers think is the opinion of the average (i.e. right-wing) American about the war in Vietnam.

One of these movies is called *To the Shores of Hell*, produced and directed by Will Zens. In this picture, as is often the case in American war movies, the social, economic and political background of the war is not even hinted at. All the public is allowed to witness is an isolated, individual adventure, in this case the 'Odyssey' of an American officer (Marshall Thompson), a Roman Catholic priest (Richard Jordahl) and a young South Vietnamese idealist (Jeff Pearl), trying to rescue the officer's brother, a doctor who has been kidnapped by the Vietcong. This trio is represented as being infinitely good, just, wise, strong and brave; their enemies, on the contrary, are nothing but brutal, sadistic beasts, setting devilishly refined traps, attacking helpless children and violating every woman they can lay hands on. They are so utterly stupid (a rock thrown in another direction diverts them immediately) that if the real Vietcong were only half as stupid as Zens' are, the Vietnam war would have been over since 1963 at least. The only scenes in which you can see a handful of tanks and soldiers (there is a war going on after all, isn't there?) are either stock-shot or documentary material. The beach scene from Zinnemann's *From Here to Eternity* is involuntarily parodied, and there is at least one scene which is so ridiculous that it made me almost forget my anger and frustration: a scene in which the kidnapped American doctor has to be forced to take care of a group of wounded communists, and revenges himself by



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aiming a good dozen naïve anti-communist slogans at his patients.
To the Shores of Hell is not the only American Z-movie dealing with the war in Vietnam, but, boy, am I glad I haven't seen the other ones!

Yours faithfully,
Antwerp. RONNY VOS

SIR,—To put the record straight—Marlon Brando has not remained silent about Vietnam. He signed an advertisement organised by me and published, full-page, in *The Times* on June 2nd, 1967, entitled 'Vietnam, An American View.' Mike Nichols also signed this ad.

Yours faithfully,
London, N.W.3. MARGARET GARDINER

Belle de Jour

SIR,—*Belle de Jour*, as everyone knows, is a film in which a woman's fantasies are juxtaposed with the realities of her everyday existence. In watching the subtitled version currently being shown, I noticed that the subtitles for the fantasy sequences were printed in italics, those for the remainder of the film in ordinary lower case. But one of the subtleties of the film, surely, is that it should be ambiguous whether certain sequences are fantasy or reality. Subtitling is, of course, an expensive business, and it is probably vain to expect the distributors to rectify this; but I feel a protest must be registered against the subtitlers' arrogance in taking it on themselves to direct our interpretation and responses by means superfluous to those provided by the director.

Yours faithfully,
Cambridge. MICHAEL GROSVENOR MYER

The Paris-Pullman

SIR,—The Paris-Pullman, Drayton Gardens, S.W.10, is one of South Kensington's landmarks, with a long and interesting history. It is proposed to arrange an exhibition locally, going back to the time when the Paris-Pullman was the Bolton's Theatre, and before that to the early years of the century when it was one of London's first cinemas (the Electric Theatre, 1911, was its first incarnation).

If any of your readers has any old correspondence, photographs, newspaper cuttings, personal reminiscences, or information of any kind, would they please send it to, or get in touch with, the cinema. Everything will be carefully looked after and insured.

Yours faithfully,
Paris-Pullman Cinema,
65 Drayton Gardens,
London, S.W.10. RALPH STEPHENSON

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M-G-M for *The Fixer*, *The Extraordinary Seaman*, *Point Blank*.
PARAMOUNT PICTURES for *Smashing Time*, *Seven Days in May*, *Seconds*.
PARAMOUNT PICTURES/MARIANNE PRODUCTIONS/DINO DE LAUR-
ENTIUS for *Barbarella*.
WARNER-PATHE for *Reflections in a Golden Eye*.
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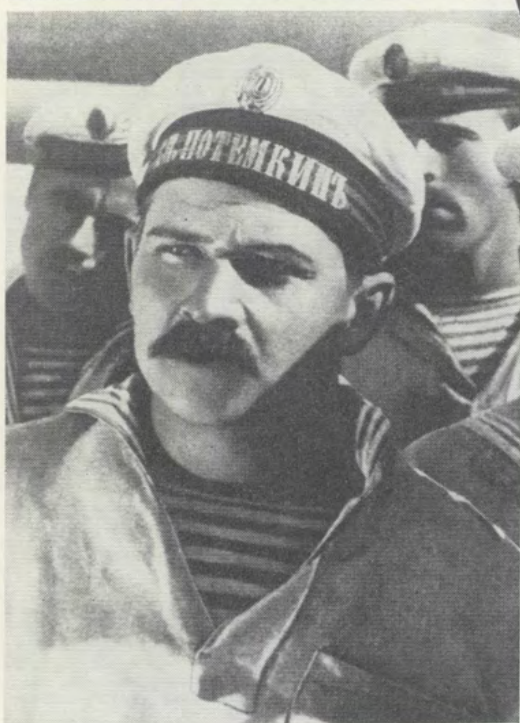
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'DAISIES'



FILM GUIDE

Films of special interest to *SIGHT AND SOUND* readers are denoted by one, two three or four stars.

COMEDIANS, THE (*M-G-M*) Graham Greene's novel about lost souls in a police-state Haiti, scripted by himself and disappointingly reduced to a string of platitudes about faith. Paul Ford and Lillian Gish offer momentary relief as a pair of innocents abroad, the Burtons pant through a series of close-up clinches, and Peter Glenville's direction falls back on lashings of local colour. (Alec Guinness, Peter Ustinov. Metrocolor, Panavision.)

CRY IN THE WIND (*Contemporary*) Grotesque melodrama set on a Greek island and involving a sailor home from the sea, his dishonoured wife, a chorus of twittering islanders, and Flora Robson as an outcast crone dabbling in witchcraft. Some splendidly ludicrous subtitles. (Yannis Voglis, Dimitra Kasma; directors, Leonard Schach, Anthony Heller.)

***DEADLY ROULETTE** (*Rank*) Weird, fascinating thriller about a young man's obsessive desire to prove his superiority—socially and sportingly—over a rich tycoon. His efforts lead him into a nightmare duel in which his life is the stake. (Robert Wagner, Peter Lawford, Lola Albright; director, William Hale. Technicolor.)

***DEPART, LE** (*Contemporary*) Skolimowski in Belgium, and a little under the influence of Godard in his story of a boy and his obsession with fast cars. Witty, assured and puckishly funny; but it lacks the compulsive fascination of *Barrier*. (Jean-Pierre Léaud, Catherine Duport, Jacqueline Bir.)

DOCTOR DOLITTLE (*Fox*) Rex Harrison in immaculately irascible form, a Dolittle tempered by Higgins, in the extravagant musical version of Hugh Lofting's stories. It tries hard to please, with quaint English village, circus, shipwreck, and animals all over the place. Even pet-obsessed children, however, might feel that enough is enough. (Samantha Eggar, Anthony Newley; director, Richard Fleischer. DeLuxe Color, Todd-AO.)

*****ELVIRA MADIGAN** (*Academy/Connoisseur*) An exquisite essay in pure romanticism: the story of the dreamy, doomed love affair between a tight-rope dancer and a young army officer in sunny, pastoral, turn-of-the-century Denmark. (Pia Degermark, Thommy Berggren; director, Bo Widerberg. Eastman Colour.) *Reviewed.*

ENDLESS SUMMER, THE (*Columbia*) Documentary account of two surfers and their worldwide quest for the perfect wave. It's all right if you're interested. (Director, Bruce Brown. Technicolor.)

FABULOUS ADVENTURES OF MARCO POLO, THE (*Golden Era*) Raoul Levy's ill-fated epic, which suffered various changes of cast and director and emerges rather glumly, apart from a delightfully absurd performance by Akim Tamiroff as the Old Man of the Mountains. (Horst Buchholz, Omar Sharif, Anthony Quinn; director, Denys de la Patellière. Eastman Colour.)

FIRECREEK (*Warner-Pathé*) James Stewart as the hesitant sheriff of a small town, trying to cope peaceably with a band of roistering gunmen. We have seen it all before (much better done), and the message about violence is trumpeted with embarrassing obviousness. (Henry Fonda, Gary Lockwood; director, Vincent McEveety. Technicolor, Panavision.)

***GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER** (*Columbia*) Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn as liberal parents strangely perturbed by the news that their daughter intends to marry Sidney Poitier. Some skilful writing, and Tracy's

last screen appearance is not to be missed. But *The Problem* looms large, and the dice are loaded. (Katharine Houghton, Cecil Kellaway; director, Stanley Kramer. Technicolor.)

HALF A SIXPENCE (*Paramount*) Tommy Steele frisking through the musical version of *Kipps*, now expanded to include Henley and Blenheim, as well as a lot of energetic but over-drilled numbers. Somewhere inside the big professional structure, there may be a cheerful little musical fighting to get out. (Julia Foster, Cyril Ritchard; director, George Sidney. Technicolor, Panavision.)

HAPPY GIPSIES...! (*R.S.E.*) Compendium of unbridled gipsy passions, with the hero dividing his time between drink, lust, vengeance and goose-feather collecting. The sociological details may interest collectors of curious facts, and the colour photography is stunning. (Bekim Fehmiu, Olivera Vuco; director, Aleksander Petrovic. Eastman Colour.)

HERE WE GO ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH (*United Artists*) Clive Donner goes to Stevenage New Town for a Swinging British Cinema version of Hunter Davies' sub-Salinger novel about a frustrated adolescent. Mini-skirts and monologues, pop songs and fantasy, and all very arch. (Barry Evans, Judy Geeson, Angela Scoular, Sheila White. Technicolor.)

*****HUGS & KISSES** (*Contemporary*) Extremely engaging Pinter-ish comedy about a young business executive, his desirable wife, and the eccentric friend who comes to stay. Cool, calm and elliptically funny in its exploration of sexual and social manners, it marks a very promising debut by young Swedish director Jonas Cornell. (Agneta Ekman, Håkan Serner, Sven-Bertil Taube.) *Reviewed.*

INSIDE NORTH VIETNAM (*Contemporary*) Elementary, unadorned documentary, shot in Hanoi and the North Vietnamese countryside. Naively affectionate propaganda (smiling peasants, children, old Uncle Ho), but some desolating views of the ruins of war. (Director, Felix Greene. Eastman Colour.)

*****MAHANAGAR** (*Contemporary*) Deliciously and touchingly funny Satyajit Ray film about an Indian modern woman and her tribulations as wife and knitting-machine saleswoman. Marred only by the slightly melodramatic denouement. (Madhabi Mukherjee, Anil Chatterjee.)

MERCENARIES, THE (*M-G-M*) Rod Taylor as tough mercenary captain in the Congo, whose command includes a blood-lusting ex-SS man and a noble representative of emergent Africa. Schoolboy yarn (trains, diamonds, Simbas) unattractively styled for 1968 with sanguinary action and painful efforts to straddle the political/moral fence. (Yvette Mimieux, Peter Carsten, Jim Brown; director, Jack Cardiff. Metrocolor, Panavision.)

*****MOUCHETTE** (*Contemporary*) Bresson's superb adaptation of the Bernanos novel about a peasant girl driven to suicide by the indifference around her. Radiant, self-absorbed, dispassionately compassionate: in other words, a Bresson film. (Nadine Nortier.)

*****MY WAY HOME** (*Contemporary*) The film Miklós Jancsó made before *The Round-Up*, about a young Hungarian student in 1945 who finds himself herding cows with a Russian corporal. Observant, elliptical, funny and honest, a reminiscence from a hallucinatory world. (András Kozák, Sergei Nikonenko.) *Reviewed.*

NEW FACE IN HELL (*Rank*) George Peppard as the usual private eye bludgeoning his way through the usual tangle of murder, blackmail and double-dealing. John Guillermin's direction strangles the occasional signs of life shown by script and cast. (Raymond Burr, Gayle Hunnicutt, Coleen Gray. Technicolor, Techniscope.)

****POINT BLANK** (*M-G-M*) Lee Marvin as a crook on the track of his two-timing associates. Attractively shot West Coast locations, and John Boorman's direction generally solid and often imaginative, if inclined towards some extravagant trickiness. (Angie Dickinson, Keenan Wynn. Metrocolor, Panavision.) *Reviewed.*

*****REBELLION** (*Orb*) Kobayashi returns to the theme of *Harakiri* in this beautifully measured attack on the Japanese code of honour. Visually as striking as ever, and like a giant chess game in the way it counterpoints meditative calm with some superbly choreographed swordplay. (Toshiro Mifune, Takeshi Kato, Yoko Tsukasa, Tatsuya Nakadai. Tohoscope.) *Reviewed.*

*****REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE** (*Warner-Pathé*) Mean, moody and rather magnificent tale of strange desires and bizarre fancies on an army

post in the Deep South. Huston's best job of direction in some time and very striking, even in its simplified colour version. (Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor, Brian Keith, Julie Harris. Technicolor, Panavision.) *Reviewed.*

ROMEO AND JULIET (*Paramount*) Zeffirelli's version, the sad story of two star-crossed teenagers. Bang goes passion, poetry and aristocracy, and one's largely left with a frail and woebegone tale and a lot of brawling in the streets of Verona. (Leonard Whiting, Olivia Hussey, Michael York. Technicolor.)

SCALPHUNTERS, THE (*United Artists*) Jocular Western with tough trapper (Burt Lancaster) and escaped Negro slave (Ossie Davis) learning to love each other as they tangle with a pack of wicked scalphunters. Fine photography and some nice scenes, but rather too cute for its own good. (Telly Savalas, Shelley Winters; director, Sydney Pollack. De Luxe Color, Panavision.)

SECRET WAR OF HARRY FRIGG, THE (*Rank*) Shaggy-dog war story (with extensive mangy patches) about five Allied generals, languishing happily as PoWs in a luxurious Italian villa, who have to be rescued by a sad sack private (Paul Newman) with a talent for escapology. (Sylvia Koscina, John Williams, James Gregory; director, Jack Smight. Technicolor, Techniscope.)

***SEVEN GOLDEN MEN** (*Warner-Pathé*) Italian perfect robbery saga. Routine but slick, professional and mildly entertaining. (Philippe Leroy, Rossana Podesta; director, Marco Vicario. Eastman Colour.)

***TELL ME LIES** (*London Continental*) Peter Brook and the Royal Shakespeare Company's curious, wayward mish-mash of a film about attitudes in London and elsewhere to the Vietnam war. Bits of *US*; reconstructed incidents; much talk: total effect equivocal in the extreme. (Part in colour.) *Reviewed.*

***THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE** (*Rank*) Zesty Twenties' musical. Julie Andrews charlestons her way through assorted hazards to marry a millionaire, and Beatrice Lillie, with chopsticks in her hair, makes a superbly sinister white slave trader. (Mary Tyler Moore, James Fox, Carol Channing; director, George Roy Hill. Technicolor.)

TIGER MAKES OUT, THE (*Columbia*) Sluggish adaptation of Murray Schisgal's one-act, two-character play about a self-educated Manhattan postman with a grudge against society and the suburban housewife he kidnaps. Top-heavy farce in place of the original's slender comedy, though Anne Jackson and Eli Wallach raise an occasional smile. (Bob Dishy, John Harkins; director, Arthur Hiller. Technicolor by Pathé.)

***TWO OF US, THE** (*Gala*) Sentimental tale of a Jewish boy sent to live with an old couple in the country during the Occupation. Endearing performance from Michel Simon as an irascible anti-Semite who befriends the boy without knowing he's Jewish, but the mawkishness shows through. (Alain Cohen, Luce Fabiole; director, Claude Berri.)

UP THE JUNCTION (*Paramount*) Nell Dunn's Chelsea girl view of life in the Battersea backstreets, given a narrative line for the big screen but if anything even more condescending than it was on television. Spirited performances from Adrienne Posta and Maureen Lipman as the put-upon sisters can't hide the false colours. (Suzy Kendall, Dennis Waterman; director, Peter Collinson. Technicolor, Techniscope.)

VALLEY OF THE DOLLS (*Fox*) Monumentally silly lid-off-showbiz epic, with everybody being beastly, lusty, dying or going berserk from the effects of either drugs or stardom. Mark Robson lingers lovingly over the clichés. (Barbara Parkins, Patty Duke, Susan Hayward. DeLuxe Color, Panavision.)

****WILD ONE, THE** (*Columbia*) Revival (unbanned at last) of the archetypal leather-jacket, motor-cycle and violence film, looking a trifle self-conscious now. But Brando's performance is still outstanding, and the dialogue has its moments. (Mary Murphy, Lee Marvin; director, Laslo Benedek.)

YOURS, MINE AND OURS (*United Artists*) Naval officer Henry Fonda marries naval widow Lucille Ball and tries to run their joint family of nineteen children on battleship discipline. A promising light comedy idea dissolves in too much slapstick, but the stars see it through. (Van Johnson; director, Melville Shavelson. De Luxe Color.)

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